

**The Features and Significance
of *Jingju* Plays**

(1790 – 1911)

**By
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Abstract

Jingju as a genre has been extensively studied and its performance is not unfamiliar to the Western audience, who know it by the terms “Chinese opera” or “Peking opera”. There are however few studies on the texts of *jingju* plays. The present thesis examines *jingju* plays written from 1790 to 1911, analyzing their features and achievements. It makes extensive use of texts from the *Che Wang Fu* Repertoires, which have been edited and published only in recent years. It will argue that, contrary to the accepted scholarly opinions, *jingju* plays are highly significant because they deal with new ideas, reinterpretations of history and the critique of traditions.

The thesis devotes each chapter to one major subject area in *jingju* plays. They are: Marketplace Play and Love Story Play produced during the incubating period of *jingju*, History Play, Courtroom Play and Frontier Fortress Play created during the later stage of the development of *jingju*. In dealing with each area the thesis will analyze the achievements and significance of the texts of *jingju* plays.

Developed from various popular *xiqu* in the late eighteenth and nineteenth century, *jingju* plays arose at a time when the traditional Chinese hierarchical society was on the verge of collapse. In the depiction of daily life or matters involving historical or ideological issues, *jingju* playwrights raised a number of major questions not touched on by classical *xiqu* playwrights. *Jingju* playwrights have achieved breakthroughs in their criticisms of traditional culture, traditional moral codes and

the hierarchical imperial system.

The thesis argues that three main factors contributed to the breakthroughs of *jingju* plays. Firstly, commercialism played an important role in the rise of popular playwrights and the expansion of popular arts and literature in the later periods of Chinese traditional society, particularly in the late Qing. Another factor was political. The abolition of the official musician prostitutes, for example, facilitated the further commercialization of the performing arts. The third factor was literary. *Jingju* playwrights inherited new ideas, plots, characterization and settings of popular literature such as popular novels.

Acknowledgement

The research undertaken by the present thesis is based on the recently available *Che Wang Fu* Repertoires. This collection of repertoires was once kept inside the mansion of a Mongolian Prince in Beijing. It was later kept separately in different libraries around the world. A few years ago, I had the opportunity to examine this collection of repertoires, and then I paid several trips to the Beijing University Library, the Zhongshan University Library and the Capital Library in China, where I took notes, edited and arranged these repertoires. Consequently, the idea to take up this study sprouted.

The present thesis seeks to evaluate *jingju* plays, but in the process of writing, the more I read, the more I realized that this topic touched on very complex issues in traditional Chinese literature and culture issues. For the fact that I was bold enough to undertake this study, I must first and foremost, thank my supervisors Dr Mobo Gao and Dr Maria Flutsch. Without their detailed suggestions and highly professional supervision, the present thesis would not have been completed. I would also like to thank them for their careful correction of the English errors. Without their help, this thesis would remain much more imperfect.

At the same time, I would also like to thank Dr Guo Yingjie. We had common interests and held some insightful discussions together. Dr Guo kindly lent his

books to me when there was insufficient material on the Han culture; he also assisted me in providing a final grammar check for the present thesis.

My special thanks are also due to the staff at the libraries above, and the University of Tamsmania, Baileu Library at the University of Melbourne, Si Louis Matheeson Library at Monash University, and Fu Silian Library in Taiwan. In particular, I would like to thank Mr Du Zhengsheng and Dr Liu Liyan from the Institute of History and Philology of Academia Sinica for being instrumental in organising my visit to Taiwan. With their assistance, I was able to do the research that was needed.

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Abbreviations

- QYLS *Qingdai yandu liyuan shiliao* (*Historical Sources of Beijing's Theatre in Qing Dynasty*).
- QYLSX *Qingdai yandu liyuan shiliao –xubian*
(*Historical Sources of Beijing's Theatre in Qing Dynasty Continued*).
- ZGXLJ *Zhongguo guodian xiqu lunzhu jicheng*
(*The Best of Chinese Classical Xiqu Works*).

Chapter One

Introduction

It is more than two hundred years since Gao Langting's first arrival in Beijing along with the San Qing theatrical troupe to perform on the birthday celebration of Emperor Qianlong in 1790. Within these two hundred or so years, books dedicated to *jingju* have covered every aspect of this popular *xiqu*, but little attention has been paid to the *jingju* plays themselves.

Jingju is usually known in English as Chinese opera and *xiqu* is a general term for theatre or musical theatre. However, since these translations are not very satisfactory I am going to use the Chinese terms throughout the thesis.

As mentioned above, the study of *jingju* plays has been very weak up until now, some scholars hold that *jingju* plays were not written by outstanding playwrights and that they are not glorious examples of *jingju*. In their view, *jingju* plays do not reflect nor narrate Chinese history and Chinese thinking. From the eighteenth to the nineteenth centuries, the creation of *xiqu* was very weak. Therefore, the achievements of *jingju* plays could not be considered in the same breath with that of *Yuan zaju* and *chuanqi*.¹

¹ See Yu Qiuyu. *Zhongguo xiqu wenhua shisu (A History of Chinese Theatre Culture)*. Changsha: Hunan Renming Chubanshe, 1985. "Huang Shizhong. *Zhongguo xiqu zhi hongguan fazhan*" (*Macro*

Is it true that *jingju* plays did not leave behind any great examples? Did *jingju* plays become very weak? This thesis will focus on the study of *jingju* plays produced from 1790 to 1911. This study uses new materials from the *Che Wang Fu* Repertoires of *jingju* plays, written during 1790-1911. Arranged and published only in recent years, these new materials will enable the study of *jingju* plays to enter into a new phase.

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section is a literature review, including studies by Western scholars and Asian scholars. The second section discusses the structure and significance of the thesis. The third section discusses the resources and methodology.

1.1 Literature Review

1.1.1 Studies by Western Scholars and Publications in English

Asian and Western scholars have introduced the art of *jingju* to the Western world at a very early stage. In 1937, a Chinese scholar, Cecilia S. L. Zung's *Secrets of the Chinese Drama*² presented summaries of fifty *jingju* plays and included various illustrations and photos in order that the readers would gain an understanding of or

development of Chinese Xiqu). In (*Wang Jisi congjiao 70 zhounian jinian wenji*) (*A Memorial Selection for the Seventieth Anniversary of Wang Jisi's Work to Education*). Guangzhou: Zhongshan Daxue Chubanshe, 1993. pp. 70-89.

² Zung, Cecilia S. L. *Secrets of the Chinese Play*. London: George G. Harrap & Co., Ltd. 1937.

discover the secrets of Chinese theatre. Elizabeth Halson's *Peking Opera* was published in 1966. The author's aim was to arouse readers' interests in Eastern theatre and assist them in gaining a greater understanding of the relationship between theatre and Chinese culture.³ This book was divided into seven chapters, which introduced the development of *xiqu*, and discussed different aspects of *xiqu* such as performers, costumes, make-up, stage props, performances, music and singing. It also included summaries of fifteen *jingju* plays. A.C. Scott's *The Classical Theatre of China* was an important work in the early period of the study of *jingju*.⁴ It introduced and discussed *jingju* in terms of music, performers, performing skills, stage and plays while giving more attention to performing skills. About half of the book focused on the performers' different moves and skills, including one hundred and seven ways of using sleeves. Due to Scott's attention to detail, this book is very much a small-scale *jingju* dictionary.

Further studies of *jingju* appeared from the 1970s. The publication of several influential works contributed greatly to a better understanding *jingju*. The first was Colin P. Mackerras' *The Rise of the Peking Opera* (1972)⁵. The second was William Dolby's *A History of Chinese Drama*.⁶ The third was Jo Riley's *Chinese Theatre and the Actor in Performance*, and the fourth was Elizabeth Wichmann's *Listening*

³ Halson, Elizabeth. *Peking Opera*. Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1966. See the Introduction of her book.

⁴ Scott, A.C. *The Classical Theatre Of China-With Illustration by the Author*. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1957.

⁵ Mackerras, Colin P. *The Rise of the Peking Opera*. London: Oxford University Press, 1972.

⁶ Dolby, William. *A History of Chinese Drama*. London: Elek Books Limited, 1976.

to Theatre: *The Aural Dimension of Beijing Opera*.⁷ Dolby's work is a theatre history that included modern drama and also contained a chapter that touched on *jingju*. Riley's work presented a detailed introduction of the various strict training that the performers went through. It carried the introduction and the studies of performing skills a step forward. Wichmann's work focused on the research of *jingju* music. This work had a clear introduction to the two musical systems of *xiqu*, enabling people to have a systematic understanding *jingju*, including its music, language, the composition of music, orchestra, and so on.

Since Mackerras' *The Rise of the Peking Opera* has a close relationship with my study, it attracted much of my attention. The aim of the author was to present to us the development of *jingju*, what the theatrical world was like in the Qing Dynasty, and how it functioned in society. *The Rise of the Peking Opera* mostly focused on the period from 1770 to 1870, when regional theatre rose and *jingju* was "conceived" and developed. The book was chronologically arranged, thus taking on a historical dimension. The author went to great lengths in the study of actors and performance, as can be seen from such titles as "Actor in Society", "Actors of the Middle Tao-kuang Period", "The Social Status of Actors" and "Actors as a Professional Guilds". The book's strengths do not simply lie in its skilful examination of the art of performing, but also in its emphasis on the examination of actors' social background and social status while studying the actors. A view that runs through the work is that while the actors' social status in the traditional

⁷ Riley, Jo. *Chinese Theatre and the Actor in Performance*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997. Wichmann, Elizabeth. *Listening to Theatre, The Aural Dimension of Beijing Opera*, Honolulu:

Chinese society was low, they were a professional guild by themselves. Actors facilitated the success of *jingju*, and the success of *jingju* enabled acting to become a profession. This is very insightful. Furthermore, the book also presents the background of the Qing society, including the economy at the time, the building of theatres, and the imperial court play.

Following this important work, Mackerras continued to publish a total of five books relating to Chinese theatre and *jingju*, including *The Chinese Theatre in Modern Times* and *The Performing Arts in Contemporary China*.⁸ Furthermore, Mackerras also published a number of papers in academic journals. ‘Theatre and Taiping’ is particularly inspirational in pointing out that the Taiping Rebellion advocated a popular literary style that was easy to understand and that the Taipings’ indifference to the overly elegant classical *xiqu* contributed to the decline of classical *xiqu*.

Apart from the works mentioned above, there are also different kinds of supplementary materials and achievements related to the study of *jingju*. There is, for instance, Deben Bhattacharya’s *Chinese Opera and Folk Music*, together with its slide show and cassettes. Even in picture storybooks there are traces of *jingju* plays and Chinese literature. For example, Peter Schat’s *Aap Verslaat de Knekelgeest (Monkey Subdues the White-Bone Demon)* tells a story about Monkey Sun Wukong. “Monkey dramas are most certainly not intended only for children.

University of Hawaii Press, 1991.

⁸ *The Chinese Theatre in Modern Times, From 1840 to the Present Day, The Performing Arts in Contemporary China, Chinese Theatre, From its Origins to the Present Day, Peking Opera and Amateur Theatre in China 1949-1966.*

Adults love them just as much.”⁹ The examples, articles and papers listed in the footnote show that, in one sense, *xiqu*, particularly *jingju*, is not strange to the Western people. The authors of these articles and papers include professional researchers as well as amateurs of *xiqu*.¹⁰

Since the twentieth century, Western scholars have continued to discover virgin land in the field of *jingju*. So far, most areas of *jingju* have been touched on, including *jingju* plays, performances, actors, costumes, stage props, make-up, musical instruments, theatre stages and other aspects. However, we can see that the study of *jingju* plays themselves is still weak. Both Scott’s and Mackerras’ books devote only one chapter to the discussion of *jingju* plays. Mackerras includes his chapter related to *jingju* scripts in the appendix, which suggests that he did not want this chapter to represent the achievements of *jingju*. Dolby’s *A History of Chinese Drama* has one chapter fully devoted to the discussion of *jingju*. However, in this chapter, apart from a detailed translation of Scene Seven of the play *Zuo Fang Cao* (*The Capture and Release of Cao Cao*), there is little detailed discussion. In Zung’s *Secrets of the Chinese Drama* and Halson’s *Peking Opera*, there are some synopses of *jingju* plays but no close analysis of these plays.

⁹ Mackerras, Colin. *The Performing Arts in Contemporary China*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 1981. p. 207

¹⁰ Cheng Scarlet. “I Heard a Voice from My Memory: Chinese Opera and Film.” *Asian Art and Culture*. vol. 7 (Spring/Summer 1994): 80-95. Goldstein, Joshua. “Mei Lanfang and the Nationalization of Peking Opera.” *Positions East Asia Cultures Critique*, vol. 7, no.2 (1999): 377-420. Jones, Stephen. *Folk Music of China-Living Instrumental Traditions*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1995. Johnson, Elizabeth Lominska. “Cantonese Opera Costumes in Canada.” *Arts of Asia*, vol. 27 (27 Jan./Feb.1997): 112-25. Pian, Rulan Chao. “Aria Structural Patterns in the Peking Opera.” *Chinese and Japanese music-dramas*, vol. 19(1975): 65-79. Ququemelle, Marie-Claire. *The Education of a Singer at the Beijing Opera*. (Videorecording). Princeton, N. J.: Films for the Humanities & Sciences, 1994. Ruyak, Jacqueline. “Chinese Opera: Theatre for the Senses.” *Fiberarts*. vol. 23 (Mar./ Apr. 1997): 49-55.

1.1.2 The Studies of Asian Scholars

Chinese scholars' studies of *jingju* began earlier than the Westerners. Ever since the rise of regional theatre, there were records of research in this area. Two large-scale books, edited by Zhang Jiangcai were published, which collected fifty-one reading notes from various scholars relating to regional theatre, including *jingju* written from the mid-Qing to the early period of the Republic of China. They created a favourable condition for further research.¹¹

Since 1911, the study of *jingju* has undergone four stages. The first stage lasted from 1911 to 1949. A central aim of most of the works published during this period was the collection of information.¹² For example, Wang Mengsheng's book explains the theatrical activities in Beijing since the late-Qing and some of the basic skills and common knowledge of *jingju*. Zhou Mingtai describes events that occurred in the Beijing's theatrical circles from 1813 to 1932, the biographical notes and anecdotes of significant performers, and important lists of plays performed. Zhang Xiaolun's work recounts the experience and artistic anecdotes of 303 actors from *jingju*, *kunqu* and *qinqiang*, and stories of the theatrical world. Wang Zhizhang presents the historical materials of performers, musicians, stage administrators and

¹¹ Zhang Jiangcai ed. *Qingdai yandu liyuan shiliao* (*Historical Sources of Beijing's Theatrical World in Qing Dynasty*). Beiping Suiyazai Shudian, 1934. *Qingdai yandu liyuan shiliao xubian* (*Historical Sources of Beijing's Theatrical Circle in Qing Dynasty Continued*). Beiping: Beiping Songjunge Shudian.

¹² Wang Mengsheng. *Liyuan jiahua* (*The Much-told Tales of the Theatrical Circle*). Shanghai: Shangwu Yinshuguan, 1915. Tang Botao's *Fuliancheng sanshi nian* (*Thirty Years of Fuliancheng*). Beijing Yishu Chubanshe. 1933. Qi Rushan. *Jingju zhi bianqian* (*The Changes of Jingju*), the book was first completed during 1920, and published again in 1935

costumes managers, who provided “internal service” to the imperial court during the Qing dynasty.¹³ Another work of Wang Zhizhang describes the development of the organizations that controlled theatrical affairs inside the imperial court during the Qing Dynasty, and details of performers, lists of plays and props.¹⁴ Tang Botao’s book contains biographical notes of the Fuliancheng professional theatrical training institute (*keban*). Qi Rushan records the changes in the lists of *jingju* plays, performers and theatrical troupes since the reigns of Emperors Hanfeng and Tongzhi. Apart from collecting information, these authors also present their personal opinions and views in these books. Thus, they give people a glimpse from different angles of the changes and development of *jingju*.

There are also other important works during this period.¹⁵ For example, Zhou Yibai’s treatise outlines the origin and development of the Chinese theatre stage, focusing on its style, its organization and theatrical performances. Pan Guangdan’s monograph studies the history of consanguinity of Chinese performers. Xu Muiyun’s *Zhongguo xijushi (The Theatrical History of China)* is a large-scale work that includes the history of performers, the history of theatre types, the structure of *xiqu*, different character categories, the structure of front and back stages, costumes, etc.

¹³ Wang Zhizhang. *Qingdai lingguan zhuan (Historical Material of Performers)*. Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju. 1936.

¹⁴ Wang Zhizhang’s *Qing shengpingshu zhilue (A Brief Record of Shengping Institution of the Qing Dynasty)*, compiled by Guoli Beiping yanjiuyuan shixue yanjiuhui lishizu (The Historical Studies Group of Historiography Research at The National Beijing Research Institute), and published by Shangwu Yinshuguan in 1937.

¹⁵ Zhou Yibai. *Zhongguo juchang shi (The History of Chinese Theatre Stage)*, published by Shangwu yinshuguan in 1936. Pan Guangdan’s *Zhongguo lingren xueyuan zhi yanjiu (The Study of Consanguinity of Chinese Performers)*, published in 1941 as a part of an educational series by

This work also traces the history of make-up and looks at the studies of classical *xiqu* plays, *zaju* and *chuanqi*.

The research in *jingju* during this period is impressive in terms of the amount of information collected and the depth of research, whether it is on the performers, play lists, stage, costumes, theatrical organization and other aspects. Some started their studies of performers from theatrical plays, while others began from a sociological perspective. All of these have laid a solid foundation for the study of *jingju* history.

The second stage is from 1950 to 1966. The most well known authors or critics of this period include Zhou Yibai, Tao Junqi, Xu Muiyun and Su Xue-an. Zhou Yibai's three-volume work describes the beginning and formation of the Chinese theatre, different kinds of theatres such as *zaju*, *chuanqi* and others during the Tang, Song, Yuan and Ming Dynasties. There is, in particular, very detailed information about *jingju*.¹⁶ Furthermore, the book of Tao Junqi and *Zhongguo xiju yanjiuyuan* (The Research Institute of Chinese Theatre) collects more than one thousand and two hundred lists of *jingju* plays.¹⁷ Xu Muiyun and Su Xuean's works both study the language of *xiqu* and *jingju* from the point of view of phonetics.¹⁸

Zhongshan wenhua jiaoyuguan. Xu Muiyun's *Zhongguo xijushi* (*The Theatrical History of China*), by Shijie Shuju in 1938.

¹⁶ Zhou Yibai. *Zhongguo xijushi* (*A History of Chinese Theatre*). Zhonghua Shuju Gufen Youxian Gongsi. 1953.

¹⁷ Tao Junqi and Zhongguo xiju yanjiuyuan (The Research Institute of Chinese Theatre). *Jingju jumu chutan* (*An Early Exploration of Jingju Repertoires*). Shanghai: Shanghai Wenyi Chubanshe. 1957.

¹⁸ Xu Muiyun. *Jingju ziyun* (*The Pronunciation and Rhyme of Jingju*). Shanghai Wenyi Chubanshe. 1959. Su Xuean's *Jingju shengyun* (*The Phonology of Jingju*). Shanghai Wenyi Chubanshe. 1963.

This period also witnessed the publication of numerous about performing skills works by famous actors and actresses.¹⁹ Mei Lanfang's book, for example, gives an account of his background and his journey from stage practice to artistic creation. Zhou Xinfang's book discusses the stage artistic features of *Si jin shi* (*Four Officials*) and other seven plays. Gai Jiaotian's book records his artistic experiences. Apart from these, large varieties of collected works from famous performers, including Cheng Yanqiu, Zhou Xinfang and Xun Huisheng, were also published. These works include mostly the authors' experiences and reflections on performing and other artistic activities, and their opinions about different types of theatres. At this stage, studies of *jingju* were undertaken by two groups of people: academic scholars and famous actors who had practical theatrical experience. The information from the latter, most of which was dictated, has left behind a mass of invaluable knowledge about *xiqu* performing skills from their experience.

The third period is from 1966 to 1976. This is a period of Chinese "culture revolution". The theatre studies in this period mainly focus on the so-called *jingju*

¹⁹ *Wutai shenghuo sishi nian* (*Forty years of life on the stage*), 2 volumes, in which Mei Lanfang dictated to Xu Jichuan. It was published by Shanghai Pingming Chubanshe in 1952 and 1954. *Zhou Xinfang wutai yishu* (*The Stage Performance of Zhou Xinfang*) was narrated by Zhou Xinfang, recorded by Wei Ming and Lu Zong, and published in 1961 by Zhongguo Xiju Chubanshe. *Fenmu chungqiu* was Gai Jiaotian's realisation from his artistic experiences, recorded and arranged by He Man and Long Yijiang, it was published in 1961 by Zhongguo Xiju Chubanshe. *Tan sunwukongxi biaoyan yishu* (*A Discussion on the Art of Performing Sun Wukong*), dictated by Zheng Faxiang to Liu Mengde, it was published in 1963 by Shanghai Wenyi Chubanshe. *Jingju huadan biaoyan yishu* (*The Art of Performing as Jingju Female Characters*), dictated by Xiao Cuihua and arranged by Liu Yizhen, it was published in 1962 by Beijing Chubanshe. Apart from these, large varieties of collected works from famous performers appeared like bamboo shoots after a spring rain. For example, *Mei*

yangbanxi (*jingju* model plays). No *xiqu* treatises were published during this period. Most papers on the study of *xiqu* concentrate on evaluations of “the eight model plays”, and most articles were published under the names of the “writing groups”.

The fourth stage, from 1976 up to the present, is known as the era of “theatre history”. The bibliography at the end of this thesis contains a large variety of theatre histories, which mostly relate to the research on *jingju*. Zhou Yibai’s *Zhongguo xiqu fangzhan shi gangyao* (*Essentials of the History of the Development of Chinese Xiqu*) is the author’s last work on the study of theatre history. This book deals with theatre from its origin to *jingju*, followed by Wu Guoqin’s work²⁰, which comprises one hundred topics, taking the theatre’s origin and development as the main theme. It discusses theatre from pre-Qin dynasty to late-Qing dynasty’s *jingju*. In fact, this book opens one hundred topics to be discussed by later writers. This book’s brilliant expositions have inspired many readers. Some scholars, such as Taiwan’s Chen Fang, select topics from this book when writing new books.²¹ Another important work is Yu Qiuyu’s book,²² which divides the history of theatre into two stages: the earlier stage, or the history of theatrical literature, and the later stage, or the history of artistic performance. The book uses vivid language, and it could be regarded as a book of theatre history with aesthetic meanings. In the 1990s, Ma Shaobo, Tao

Lanfang wenji (Collected Works from Mei Lanfang), *Cheng Yanqiu wenji* (Collected Works from Cheng Yanqiu) and so on.

²⁰ Wu Guoqin. *Zhongguo xiqu shi manhua* (Talking Chinese Theatre History). Shanghai: Shanghai Wenyi Chubanshe, 1980.

²¹ See Chen Fang. *Wanqing gudian xijude lishi yiyi* (The Historical Significance of Classical Theatre in Late Qing Dynasty). Taipei: Taiwan Xuesheng Chubanshe, 1988.

²² Yu Qiuyu. *Zhongguo xiqu wenhua shisu* (A History of Chinese Theatre Culture). Changsha: Hunan

Xiong and others edited *Zhongguo jingju shi* (*A History of Jingju*) was a large-scale history of *jingju*.²³ The work covers the period from 1790 to 1949, filling a big gap in *jingju* history.

Moreover, Taiwan and Japanese scholars have also written some important theatrical works and *jingju* treatises. In a literary style, Meng Yao's work recounts theatre's origin and development.²⁴ In particular, it includes extensive textual research on regional theatre such as *yi yang qiang*, *gao qiang*, *jing qiang*, *pihuang*, and other tunes of the mid-Qing Dynasty. A Japanese scholar, Aoki Masaru focuses on *kunqu*'s development from its origin, rise, great prosperity, to its decline.²⁵ Furthermore, it also concentrates on "*hua bu*" or the different types of regional theatre, their origin and evolution. Hatano Kenichi's work²⁶ presents biographies, performances and anecdotes of famous *jingju* performers, as well as about *qin qiang*.

The above outlines Asian scholars' research in *jingju*. It has many similarities with that of the Western scholars, that is, they mostly emphasise the study of theatre types, theatrical troupes, famous actors, stage, props, costumes, characters and

Renming Chubanshe, 1985.

²³ Ma Shaobo, Zhang Lihui, Tao Xiong, Zeng Bairong and Hu Bo et. al. (eds). *Zhongguo Jingju shi* (*A History of Jingju*). Beijing: Zhongguo Xiju Chubanshe, 1990.

²⁴ Meng Yao. *Zhongguo xiju shi* (*A History of the Chinese Theatre*). 4 vols. Taipei: Chuanji Wenxue Chubanshe, 1969.

²⁵ Aoki Masaru, Wang Gulu, translated. *Zhongguo jinshi xijushi* (*A History of Contemporary Chinese Theatre*). Beijing: Shangwu Yinshuguan 1936.

²⁶ Hatano Kenichi. *Jingju erbainian zhi lishi* (*The Two Hundred Years History of Jingju*), originally named *Zhinaju jiqi mingling* (*Chinese Theatre and its Famous Performers*), published in Tokyo, 1925, was translated into Chinese by Luyuan Xueren in 1926.

music. At the same time, many famous performers' reflections on art have pushed the art of performance to a new height. Further, the scholars have paid due attention to language and phonology. Consequently, the study of *jingju* has covered many different areas except *jingju* plays themselves.

TABLE 1: HISTORY OF XIQU WRITTEN BY EASTERN SCHOLARS

Country or Region	Name of Author	Title	Year of Publication
Japan	Aoki Masaru. Translated by Wang Gulu	<i>Zhongguo jinshi xijushi (A History of Contemporary Chinese Theatre)</i>	1936
Taiwan	Xu Muyun	<i>Zhongguo xijushi (The History of Chinese Theatre)</i>	1977 (photocopy)
Taiwan	Chen Wannai	<i>Yuan Ming Qing xiquishi (The History of Theatrical Music during the Yuan, Ming and Qing Dynasties)</i>	1966
Taiwan	Meng Yao	<i>Zhongguo xiquishi (The History of Chinese Theatre)</i>	1969
Taiwan	Chen Fang	<i>Wanqing gudian xijude lishi yiyi (The Historical Significance of Classical Theatre in Late Qing Dynasty)</i>	1988
China	Zhou Yibai	<i>Zhongguo xijushi (A History of Chinese Theatre).</i>	1953
China	Zhou Yibai	<i>Zhongguo xiqu fazhanshi gangyao (Essentials of the History of the Development of Chinese Xiqu).</i>	1979
China	Wu Guoqin	<i>Zhongguo xiquishi manhua (Talking Chinese Theatre History)</i>	1980
China	Zhang Geng, Guo Hancheng	<i>Zhongguo xiqu tongshi (A History of Chinese Xiqu)</i>	1981/1984
China	Zheng Chuanyin	<i>Zhongguo xiqu wenhua gailun (An Introduction to Chinese Theatre History)</i>	1993
China	Yu Cong, Zhou Yude, Jin Shui	<i>Zhongguo xiqu shilue (Brief Chinese Theatre History)</i>	1993
China	Zhou Yude	<i>Zhongguo xiqu wenhua (Chinese Xiqu Culture).</i>	1996
China	Li Wanjun	<i>Zhongguo gujin xijushi (The History of Chinese Ancient and Contemporary Theatres)</i>	1997

In the treatises mentioned above, most of authors do not talk about *jingju* plays, and when they do, there is no analysis or comments about any of the *jingju* plays. The work of the late scholar Zhou Yibai, an influential figure of the Eastern and Western theatrical scholars, is worth mentioning. In this book, *Zhongguo xiqu shi* (*A History of Chinese Theatre*), there is more specific and detailed analysis of plays created prior to the seventeenth century. However, during the rise of *jingju* in the eighteenth century, most analysis and comments were on artistic performance of famous actors, and discussion of *jingju* plays were confined only to small synopses. Zhou's work was revised and renamed, and then published in 1979. Zhou deleted the analysis of *jingju* plays, because the brief analysis in his 1953 publication had already given people misconceptions about *jingju* plays. Therefore, Zhou's decision to leave this unfinished task for the future scholars is admirable.

Apart from those in the table, there are currently two works that truly live up to their name as treatises of *jingju*. The first one is *Zhongguo jingju shi* (*A History of Jingju*), edited by Ma Shaobo and his co-writers. This is the only and most ambitious work on *jingju* history ever published in the twentieth century.

Contributors to the work include more than twenty scholars from Beijing and Shanghai. Up until now, amongst the works of *xiqu* history written by other scholars, there is no work that can compare to it. As a large-scale work on the history of *jingju*, the authors spent a large amount of time and effort in collecting materials, particularly in information about performers. Unfortunately, we cannot

see more analysis of *jingju* plays in this book, particularly of the plays from the mid-late Qing (1790 to 1911). The authors simply list some of the plays performed during that period, and briefly analyze three plays.²⁷ As I have mentioned above, it is a work that is supposed to fill a gap. However, as a large-scale work that is named as the history of *jingju*, it is unfortunate to see that its play evaluation still has not surpassed Zhou Yibai's *The History of Chinese Theatre*, written thirty-seven years ago. As compared with Zhou Yibai's work, it spends devotes about fifty percent less space to the evaluation of *jingju* plays.

The second book is titled *Jingju erbainian gaikuang (A Survey of Two Hundred Years of Jingju)*, written by Su Yi.²⁸ This is a better book so far as the discussion of *jingju* plays is concerned. However, this book only has about four thousand words to say about the content of plays created from 1790 to 1911. Although Su Yi makes many valuable comments in his book, they are mostly unsubstantiated generalisations, which do not give the reader a clear picture of the gradual development of *jingju* plays in the Qing Dynasty.

Since the study of *jingju* plays has always been very weak, their achievements have not received proper evaluation. Yu Qiuyu, a Chinese scholar, uses the mid-Qing as a borderline and divides the history of Chinese *xiqu* into two stages. The first stage was the era of classical *xiqu* that includes *Yuan zaju* and *chuanqi*, and the later stage

²⁷ *Ku rou ji (A brilliant scheme)*, *Wu ren yi (The relationship between five people)* and *Si jinshi (Four Officials)*.

was the era of regional *xiqu* (popular *xiqu*) and *jingju*. He holds that the play writing in the early stage of Chinese *xiqu* history had achieved great success. In the later stage, *jingju* plays did not leave behind excellent examples and their achievements could not be considered in the same breath with *Yuan zaju* and *chuanqi*.²⁹ According to him, the popular *xiqu* playwrights and *jingju* playwrights were poorly educated. From the eighteenth to the nineteenth centuries, no outstanding playwrights emerged.³⁰ While agreeing with the view of Yu Qiuyu, another scholar Huang Shizhong also holds that in the later stage of the Chinese *xiqu* history, the content of plays greatly decreased.³¹

Admittedly, both Yu Qiuyu and Huang Shizhong see the differences in performing skills between classical *xiqu* and popular *xiqu*. They have also noticed the differences in play writing. However, whether Yu Qiuyu and Huang Shizhong have described *jingju* plays accurately is a problem worth exploring.

From the literature review, we see that neither Western nor Asian scholars have focused on the study of plays in the field of *jingju* studies. In order to address the weakness, this thesis focuses on the study of *jingju* plays produced from the mid-

²⁸ Su Yi, *Jingju erbainian gaikuang* (A Survey of Two Hundred Years of Jingju). Beijing: Beijing Yanshan Chubanshe, 1989, 1990.

²⁹ Yu Qiuyu. *Zhongguo xiqu wenhua shisu* (A History of Chinese Theatre Culture). Changsha: Hunan Renming Chubanshe, 1985, p. 447.

³⁰ Ibid. P. 443 and p. 448.

³¹ Huang Shizhong. "Zhongguo xiqu zhi hongguan fazhan" (Macro-development of Chinese Xiqu). In *Wang Jisi congjiao 70 zhounian jinian wenji* (A Memorial Selection for the Seventieth Anniversary of Wang Jisi's Work to Education). Guangzhou: Zhongshan Daxue Chubanshe, 1993, p. 87.

Qing till the late-Qing,³² from 1790 to 1911.³³ Further, I will challenge Yu Qiuyu and Huang Shizhong's opinions. For this reason, I will comprehensively discuss the achievements of *jingju* plays, at different stages and from different perspectives, and in particular, their creativity in topic and themes.

1.2 The Structure and Significance of This Thesis

For the purpose of this thesis, I have divided the plays written from 1790 to 1911 into two stages. The first stage, from 1790 to 1840, is the incubating period for *jingju*. The second, from 1840 to 1911, is the birth and development period for *jingju*. These stages are recognised by most scholars today.

This thesis consists of eight chapters. The first chapter is the Introduction. In the second chapter, in addition to introducing some of the basic concepts of the *xiqu* history, we will discuss the reasons behind the decline of classical *kunqu* and the rise of popular *xiqu*. Chapters Three to Seven analyse *jingju* plays and explore the achievements of *jingju* plays. Chapter Three focuses on Marketplace Plays and Chapter Four, Love Story Plays. Both types of plays belong to the incubating period of *jingju*. Among them, some of the love story plays are also written during the birth and development stage of *jingju*. Chapter Five to Chapter Seven discuss

³² The later stage in the history of *xiqu* as pointed out by Yu Qiuyu and Huang Shizhong, refers to the period from the mid-Qing to 1911.

³³ It is to say from a broader view. Of course, there were also some plays written before 1790, which were the traditional plays of the Anhui troupes. These plays are also important resources in the study of *jingju* plays.

plays written during the second stage. This was a time of the history play's high popularity. In particular, Chapter Six focuses on the Courtroom Play and Chapter Seven describes the Frontier Fortress Play. Both belong to the category of historical play because their plots focus on various historical figures. Of course, there are some history plays written in the early *jingju* era, and some marketplace plays during the second stage of *jingju*, but the discussions I have made are broadly appropriate. Chapter Eight is the conclusion.

In the main body of the thesis, Chapter Two to Chapter Seven, I will not directly debate with Yu Qiuyu and Huang Shizhong regarding the quality of *jingju* plays. My main aim there is to describe the development of *jingju* plays in comprehensive detail. The conclusion will draw the threads of the argument together and that argument raises questions about Yu Qiuyu and Huang Shizhong's argument that *jingju* plays were never of high quality.

This study will attempt to highlight the following aspects. The first issue involves the relationship between the official musician prostitute system and the performer. The abolition of the former in the Qing Dynasty led to the full commercialization of *xiqu* performance. This huge change in the history of Chinese *xiqu*, precipitated the decline of *kunqu* and the rise of popular *xiqu*, and it is helpful to our understanding of *jingju* plays.

Secondly, this study touches on the art of performance of the early *jingju*. *Jingju* is a

performing art that has developed comprehensively in singing, acting, speaking and fighting. We need to know not only this performing system but also the process that has led to this product. Only when we understand the process can we then truly understand *jingju* and *jingju* plays. We will present a group of plays rarely seen. The *Che Wang Fu* Repertoire shows us that the early *jingju* is a performing art in that it has obvious characteristics of folk arts and is full of vitality. Its content mostly describes marketplace people and events, and takes the form of *xiaoju* (laughing play) and comedy in order to accommodate the needs of the lower classes. As the content of plays approach historical military subjects, they begin to take on a new system that combines singing, acting, speaking and fighting.

As is known to researchers of *jingju*, in the Qing Dynasty, *jingju* developed in the face of various strict government prohibitions. What we will further point out is that during the Ming and Qing Dynasties, there was a law banning the portrayal of emperors, empresses and loyal subjects of past dynasties on the stage. This prohibition prevented history plays from fully extending themselves for a long time. The late-Qing was a time when the hierarchy system was on the verge of collapse and a time for social reform. It was against this social background that *jingju* playwrights broke the law and made the history play popular.

My analysis also includes three different special topics. The first is the love story play. In traditional Chinese society, traditional moral codes placed extreme restrictions on the love between young people. Thus, the love story plays often

reflect the conflicts between love and traditional moral codes. Love story plays in classical *xiqu* of *Yuan zaju* and *chuanqi*, at their peak have broken through the traditional moral codes to pursue true love. On the basis of classical *xiqu*, *jingju*'s love story play go further.

Second is the courtroom play. Most of the courtroom plays and their plots focus on the historical figure Bao Zheng. In *Yuan zaju*, Bao Zheng plays and courtroom plays reach their peak. What are the differences of *jingju*'s Bao Zheng plays and courtroom plays? This study will place greater emphasis on the links of these plays with the law, demonstrating the achievements of *jingju*'s Bao Zheng play and courtroom play.

The third is the frontier fortress play. In Chinese history, wars occurred frequently in the borderlands. The content of frontier fortress play reflects stories in this area. The traditional writer and commentators of frontier fortress literature were mostly people of the Han nationality, and thus they were more likely to reflect value from the perspective of the Han culture. However, there was a clear change in the Qing Dynasty's frontier fortress plays. The playwrights no longer view things from the perspective of Han culture only, but from a multi-nationalities viewpoint. Why did this occur? This is also of interest to me in this thesis.

On the basis of studying the features of *jingju*, I will further explore the question of how *jingju* was able to accomplish these achievements in the Conclusion chapter.

This study also has its significance in other areas. The fundamental reason for the weakness of *jingju* play research is the difficulty in obtaining information about plays. The publication of *jingju* plays on a large scale occurred after 1911. In *jingju*'s two hundred years of history, Chinese society has experienced two major structural changes. Each reform has enabled *jingju* plays to present ideas for the new era. These plays, revised in different periods, do not represent the thinking of *jingju* playwrights of the Qing dynasty. This, in effect, has also created some difficulties. This study will be built upon new information. This information is called *Che Wang Fu* Repertoire, which I will discuss later. An expert in the study of *jingju*, Ma Shaobo, believes that "these repertoires not only reveal the true state of society at the time, they also clearly define the process of *jingju*'s beginning, development and its historical traditions. These first hand information is more persuasive than any records."³⁴ The late *xiqu* commentator, Wang Jisi, also held that "the discovery of the *Che Wang Fu* Repertoire in modern times was as important as the discovery of inscriptions on bones or tortoise shells and Anyang literature."³⁵

I have been involved in the study of the *Che Wang Fu* Repertoire for more than a decade. As the first of authors, I published *Che Wang Fu quben tiyao* (*Summary of the Che Wang Fu Repertoire*) in 1989. The book first caught attention of some

³⁴ Ma Shaobo. "Yu Wang Jisi Jiaoshou lun Che Wang Fu quben shu" (A Discussion with Professor Wang Jisi about the Che Wang Fu Repertoire). (*Guangzhou ribao*) (*Guangzhou Daily*) Guangzhou: Guangzhou Ribaoshe, 9 Oct. 1991, p 6.

³⁵ See Guo Jingrui and Chen Weiwu. *Che Wang Fu quben tiyao* (*Summary of the Che Wang Fu Repertoire*), Preface by Wang Jisi. Guangzhou: Zhongshan Daxue Chubanshe, 1989, p. 1.

Japanese and Taiwanese scholars, and is frequently cited by them.³⁶ Thereafter, as one of the chief editors, we, a group for arranging *Che Wang Fu* Repertoire, published *Che Wang Fu quben jinghua* (*The Essence of the Che Wang Fu Repertoire*) (a series of 6 books) and *Che Wang Fu quben xuan* (*Selected Works from the Che Wang Fu Repertoire*). All the selected and edited early *jingju* plays are from *Che Wang Fu* Repertoire. The *jingju* plays used in the present thesis come from the above publications.

Later on, I, also as one of the chief editors, published *The Manchu Drum Songs in the Che Wang Fu Repertoire of the Qing Dynasty* (4 books) and *Drum Songs* (3 books). These books collect another type of literary art form from the Manchu. These drum songs are not only high quality literature, they also retain a large number of invaluable information about the literature and arts circles in the Qing Dynasty". While the present thesis evaluates the value of *jingju* play, it also makes frequent use of this information as supporting evidence. Briefly, this thesis is the first attempt to systematically use this collection of repertoires to fill the gap between the decline of *kunqu* and the rise of *jingju*.

³⁶ Tanaka Issei. *About Che Wang Fu Repertoire*. In *Gakuto, Gakuto*, Maruzen Co., LTD. vol.88, no. 6 (June 1991): 4-9. *Another account of Che Wang Fu Repertoire*. In *Gakuto, Gakuto*, Maruzen Co., LTD. vol.88, no. 9 (September 1991): 8-13.

1.3 Resources and Methodology

1.3.1 Resources

The materials on which I analyse may be divided into three types: first is *jingju* plays, second is official historical records and works of thinkers of the ancient times, and third is scholars works of different dynasties including modern times and of different countries.

Jingju Plays: The Che Wang Fu Repertoire

As mentioned above, plays studied in this thesis are called the *Che Wang Fu* Repertoire. This is a collection of first-hand information in the history of *xiqu* and the history of popular literature. As this study takes this group of plays as part of the *jingju* history, their authenticity is of great importance. The first question to consider is the origin of this group of plays and whether these plays were written at the time of our interest - 1790 to 1911.

Che is the abbreviation of a Mongolian's name. *Wang* means prince and *Fu* is official mansion. *Che Wang Fu* means the official mansion of Prince Che. The full name of Prince *Che* is Chedeng-bazaer, who was one of the lineal grandchildren of

Genghis Khan.³⁷ The mansion of Prince *Che* was “located in Baochao alley, Anding Mennei Street, Beijing”.³⁸ Thus, the *Che Wang Fu* Repertoire refers to the large numbers of theatrical plays kept in the mansion of Prince *Che*. These repertoires were collected by Prince *Che*, his son and grandson. They lived at a time when the Anhui Theatrical Troupe first entered Beijing and during the formation and developmental period of *jingju*. According to *Qingshi gao* (*The History of Qing Dynasty*), the political career of Prince *Che*’s father, Lawang duoer, lasted between the reigns of Emperor Jiaqing and Daoguang (1796-1850), while *Che Wang* began his political life during the reign of Emperor Daoguang. Daerma, the son of Prince *Che*, inherited his father’s title and was named Prince *Da*. Nayantu, Prince *Da*’s son was referred to as Prince *Na*. He had a successful political life during the rule of Emperor Guangxu. After the founding of the Republic of China, he worked under the leadership of President Yuan Shikai and Cao Kun. Prince *Na* lived a life of prosperity and wealth for a long time. He had thirty family members, yet he employed more than three hundred servants and butlers. Due to his wealth, Prince *Na* began collecting paintings and calligraphy of famous artists. “The famous *jingju* actor Tan Xinpei was his good friend.”³⁹ Later on, due to wars between powerful warlords and the termination of his official salary, Prince *Na*’s living standard dropped dramatically. He soon started selling personal belongings. 1924, Prince *Na*

³⁷ Zhao Erxun. *Qingshi gao* (*A History of the Qing Dynasty*). Zhonghua Shuju, 1977, p. 14425.

³⁸ Cao Kuan narrate and Zhang Bingru record. (“Na Wang Fu sishi nian de cangsang huiyi”) (*The Recollection of 40 Years of Vicissitudes of Na Wang Fu*). In (*Wanqing gongting shenghuo jianwen*) (*The Life within the Imperial Palace during the late Qing Dynasty*). Beijing: Wenshi Ziliao Chubanshe, 1982, p. 318.

³⁹ Ibid. p. 321.

raised a loan on his mansion, and later on sold it.⁴⁰ The repertoire kept within the mansion went into different hands.

In China, the *Che Wang Fu* Repertoire is currently kept in three places: the Beijing University Library, the Capital Library and the Zhongshan University Library. These repertoires are all hand-written manuscripts. The *Che Wang Fu* Repertoire presently kept in the Beijing University Library is the original manuscripts of the first group of repertoires that were scattered over several places. The ones collected in the Capital Library are the second collection of repertoires that were lost.⁴¹ The Zhongshan University Library keeps photocopied transcripts. In the 1950s, the Capital Library made a transcript of the first collection of the *Che Wang Fu* Repertoire from the Beijing University Library. Apart from these three libraries, the Fu Sinian Library at the Institute of History and Philology, Academia Sinica, Taipei also keeps a part of the hand-copied collection of *Che Wang Fu* Repertoires. All these repertoires were hand-copied in 1928 when they were first written.⁴² The Shanghong Tang Library in Eastern Asian and the Pacific Culture Research Institute of Tokyo University in Japan keeps about forty-eight groups of the repertoires. This collection of repertoires was originally collected by a Japanese scholar, Dr Nakasawa Kikuya.⁴³ Dr Nakasawa Kikuya went to China after he graduated in 1925. "During the years in China, Nakasawa Kikuya purchased information on

⁴⁰ Ibid. pp. 316-29.

⁴¹ Lei Mengshui. "Shulin suoji" (Fragments of Information on Scholars). In (*Xuelin manlu*) (*Record of Scholarly Opinions*), ed. Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1984, vol. 9, p. 107.

⁴² Tanaka Issei. *About Che Wang Fu Repertoire*. In (*Gakuto*), vol.88, no. 6 (June 1991): 4-9. p. 7.

⁴³ Nakasawa Kikuya. *A Collection of Works by Nakasawa Kikuya*. 1982, PP. 242-44.

novels, short stories and theatre. Among them, some were *Che Wang Fu* Repertoires.”⁴⁴ The Zhongshan University Library now has the transcripts for this collection of repertoires.

Furthermore, there are four sets of microfilms of *Che Wang Fu* Repertoire in the United States and England. An American scholar, Zhao Rulan, “went to Taiwan to collect information on Chinese music. Entrusted by Harvard University, she asked the Institute of History and Philology for access to some parts of the repertoires. When the institute agreed to the request, Zhao made two hundred and forty rolls of microfilms of the repertoires. Cambridge University later made a copy of these microfilms.”⁴⁵ Yale and Princeton Universities all made copies of this set of microfilms. In recent years, the Capital Library have photocopied some parts of the *Che Wang Fu* Repertoire and published them. Zhongshan University established a research group, and their research publications can be seen in the bibliography. Therefore, there are more libraries that keep *Che Wang Fu* Repertoires today.

The *Che Wang Fu* Repertoire includes two major categories: *xiqu* and *shuochang* (a genre of popular entertainment consisting mainly of talking and singing). In particular, there are eight hundred and forty-nine works of theatre, a total of one thousand, one hundred and fifty-eight volumes. In this collection of works, there are

⁴⁴ Qiu Jiang. “Qing menggu Che Wang Fu cangquben yizhu” (An Addendum to the Index of the Che Wang Fu Repertoire). In *Zhongshan daxue xuebao* (*Journal of Zhongshan University*). Guangzhou: 1998, no. 6, p. 109.

five hundred and ninety-one *jingju* plays, and the rest are mostly plays of *kunqu* and *yingyang qiang*. However, most of these *kunqu* plays and *yingyang qiang* plays have characteristics of *jingju*, so in fact these plays were frequently performed by the Anhui Theatrical Troupe in the early days.

This collection of works can be divided into three categories. The first category is *zhizi xi* (highlights from plays). These collections of *zhizi xi* were very much in vogue from the late Qianlong period to the Jiaqing period. The plays in the second category are *jingju* plays, as evident from their writing style. Normally, a play must indicate when to sing and the musical structure accompanying the singing, but these plays only indicate when to sing and not the musical structure of *erhuang* or *pihuang*. From this point, we know that the plays in the second category were written during the Jiaqing period, because in the early year of Jiaqing period, Emperor Qianlong was still alive, and thus there were two Emperors living at the time. Since *erhuang* sounds exactly the same as the pronunciation for “two Emperors” in Chinese, in order to avoid violating the taboo, the musical structure of *erhuang* was not shown in these plays.⁴⁵ The third category of plays gives full indications of the musical structures, and use *xipi* and *erhuang* as main theatrical tunes. This category of plays was determined to have been written during the

⁴⁵ Peng Fei. “Dengdai yahuang zisun gongtong kaifa de yishu baozang” (A Hidden Treasure of Art waiting to be Discovered by all Chinese People). In *Shanghai yishujia* (*The Artists of Shanghai*), no. 4 (1987): p. 76.

⁴⁶ Just as said by a Chinese scholar Qi Rushan during the Republic of China, “In the twelfth year of Emperor Jiaqing’s ruling, the Emperor thought that *erhuang*’s pronunciation sounded the same as that of ‘two Emperors’. At the time, his father Emperor Qianlong was still alive, and there was in fact ‘two Emperors’ living inside the imperial court, thus the Emperor ordered to delete indications of

periods of Xianfeng, Tonghi and Guangxu.

These three categories of plays illustrate the different stages of *jingju*'s development. We can be sure that these plays were all written at different times, such as the periods of Daoguang, Xianfeng, Tongzhi, Guangxu, etc, when Che Wang and his descendants lived. However, we cannot find any new style *jingju* plays written during the Republic era. Therefore, we can conclude that this group of plays was produced from middle Qing to 1911.

Furthermore, these plays indicate “*quan chuan guan*” or “*zong jiang*” on the titles. “*Quang chuan guang*” means performing scripts for actors at the time, while “*zong jiang*” includes materials on performing skills and staging, which assists the director to guide the actors. Both “*quan chuan guan*” and “*zong jiang*” indicate that these plays were actually used on stage during the Qing Dynasty. These plays have many differences from those published during the Republic era and the People's Republic period. The *Che Wang Fu* Repertoire are plays that truly represent the aesthetic standards of the Qing Dynasty, without the tampering of the later generations who have edited plays according to the different social and political situations. Therefore, this group of plays provides reliable evidence to the achievements of this period's *jingju* plays.

erhuang.” See Ma Shaobo, Zhang Lihui, Tao Xiong, Zeng Bairong and Hu Bo et. al. (eds). *Zhongguo Jingju shi (A History of Jingju)*. Beijing: Zhongguo Xiju Chubanshe, 1990, p. 85.

Official Historical Records and Works of Thinkers

Another source used in this study is the official historical records. This includes Sima Qian's *Shi ji* (*Records of History*), Chen Shou's *Sanguo zhi* (*The History of the Three Kingdoms*), Wei Shou's *Wei shu* (*The History of the Wei Dynasty*), Tuo Tuo's *Song shi* (*The History of the Song Dynasty*), Jin shi (*The History of the Jin Kingdom*), Liao shi (*The History of the Liao Kingdom*), Song Lian's *Yuan shi* (*The History of the Yuan Dynasty*), Zhang Tingyu's *Ming shi* (*The History of the Ming Dynasty*), Zhao Erxi's *Qing shigao* (*A History of the Qing dynasty*), etc. These works play an important role in textual research on the system of traditional musical households and the official musician prostitute system, traditional law, the social situation of the Qing Dynasty, and in particular, the historical figures in historical plays.

Works of thinkers include works by the Confucian *Lixue School*, such as The Works of Mencius, Ercheng Yishu (*Cheng Hao and Cheng Yi's Posthumous Papers*), Zhu Xi's *Zhuzi Yulie* (*The Quotations of Zhu Xi*) and He Ruilin's *Nü-er jing* (*Regulations of Women*), etc. These works, regarded as part of orthodox Confucianism, held an orthodox position in traditional China. Works of thinkers also include the opposition faction of Confucianism and different academic schools, for example, Li Zhi's *Fenshu* (*Burning Books*) and so on. These works also play an important role in evaluating the value of jingju plays, which is demonstrated in the Love Story Play and Historical Play.

Scholars' Works of Different Dynasties

Furthermore, my information sources also include treatises from *xiqu* commentators of the Ming and Qing Dynasties. Some of the main treatises in this area are *Zhongguo guodian xiqu lunzhu jicheng* (*The Best of Chinese Classical Xiqu Works*)⁴⁷, *Qingdai yandu liyuan shiliao* (*Historical Sources of Beijing's Theatre in Qing Dynasty*) and *Qingdai yandu liyuan shiliao –xubian* (*Historical Sources of Beijing's Theatre in Qing Dynasty Continued*), both compiled by Zhang Jiangcai. These historical materials written by authors of the past are also important to this study. These works enable us to understand the opinions of the Ming and Qing about *xiqu* and *jingju*. Of course, individual idiosyncrasies and literary conventions must be distinguished from genuine comments.

The works of modern scholars include works in Chinese, Japanese and English. The English references are mostly written by Australian, European, American and Taiwan scholars. Treatises and papers of Japanese on the topic of *jingju* plays have also been included in the composition of this thesis. As for the Chinese references, their works relate to *xiqu*, literature, history, philosophy, music, art, language and folk customs.

⁴⁷ Zhongguo Xiju Yanjiuyuan (The China Academy of Theatre Research), eds and proofread. (*Zhongguo guodian xiqu lunzhu jicheng*) (ZGXLJ) (*The Best of Chinese Classical Xiqu Works*). 10 vols. Beijing: Zhongguo Xiju Chubanshe, 1959.

1.3.2 Methodology

This study evaluates *jingju* plays in the context of the period in which they were created. An analysis of the Qing Dynasty's social background reveals the factors that led to the rise of popular *xiqu*. There is also an analysis of the historical and social background of the late-Qing society, to further examine the ideas and values *jingju* plays of this period.

My study will further place *jingju* plays in the broad context of *xiqu* history, and involves comparing the classical *Yuan zaju* and *chuanqi* plays with that of *jingju* to show the differences between them. It should be pointed out, however, that the method of comparison used in this study is not the usual method used in comparative literature. My main task is to analyse and discuss *jingju* plays. Therefore, I will not deal with the achievements of *Yuan zaju* and *chuanqi* plays, which are well known to scholars. Instead, I will focus on how *jingju* plays are different from them.

At the same time, this study also closely studies the relationship of *jingju* plays with Chinese traditional culture. For example, when discussing *jingju*'s love story play, I will firstly analyse the play in the light of traditional moral codes. What are the characteristics of traditional moral codes, and what harm did they cause traditional Chinese society? What values are reflected in *jingju*'s love story play, and what role

did they play? In other words, *jingju* plays are analyzed in the context of Chinese traditional moral codes.

Traditional literature is an important component of traditional culture. This study will also examine the relationship of *jingju* plays with Chinese traditional literature. This kind of relationship not only refers to inheriting features of classical *xiqu*, but also to *jingju*'s inheriting and developing from other literary forms. What impact did popular novels have on *jingju* plays? Under the strict prohibitions of *jingju* activities by the Ming and Qing Dynasties, we can see the achievements of *jingju* were not cut off from the relationship between popular historical novels and *jingju*'s historical plays.

As a whole, the present thesis not only studies this batch of *jingju* plays from a literary angle, it also examines them from the social and historical perspectives. The methodology and outcome of the present thesis is not to arrive at a conclusion as to whether the achievements of classical *xiqu* is greater than that of the *jingju* plays or vice versa. The intention of this study is to, on the basis of examining issues reflected in *jingju* plays, further reveal the breakthroughs made by the nineteenth century *jingju* plays and to further investigate reasons behind these breakthroughs.

Jingju was formed on the basis of *pihuang*, *kunqu*, *gaoqiang* (*yiyang qiang*), *qinqiang* and *liuziqiang*, the most influential *xiqu* of the Qing Dynasty. Because of its performing artistic style is a combination of the performing styles from different

types of *xiqu*, *jingju* has also adapted some plays from various *xiqu* types. As *jingju* develops, the source of its plays widens, and at the same time, *jingju* play has also benefited other forms of *xiqu*.

In fact, the classical *kunqu* and *chuanqi* playwrights have also adapted some *zaju* plays of the Yuan Dynasty and *nanxi* plays. In the special historical period, *chuanqi* playwrights adapted the works of the predecessors using elegant languages, while *jingju* playwrights popularized some of the works by predecessors at a different era. Literature and arts need to be passed on to future generations, and the works of previous generations are often adapted and renewed periodically. Therefore, the historical and social context of the time often determines what should be made more elegant and what should be popularized. Because *jingju* plays have the foundation of novels and plays from various types of *xiqu*, *jingju* also has the cooperation by scholars and actors. This collective nature has allowed the *jingju* plays written during 1790-1911 to become the fruit of popular novels and the *xiqu* culture. Therefore, the evaluation of this period's plays is not as simple as evaluating a few playwrights from the Anhui theatrical troupes, but to review the *xiqu* plays written during this period as a whole. This is to be demonstrated by *jingju*, the representative form of *xiqu* in the modern history. I hope that, by analyzing *jingju* plays of this period, readers will not only have the insight of the feature of *jingju* plays in the nineteenth century, but also realize the achievements by other types of *xiqu* and the popular culture in the late stage of imperial China.

The discussion and analysis of *jingju* plays has to relate to the work of Yu Qiuyu. Therefore, it is necessary to analyse Yu Qiuyu's methodology. In the *A History of Chinese Theatre Culture*, Yu Qiuyu has also examined the classical *xiqu* and *jingju* plays through the literary, social and historical angles. We know that in the field of literary and art criticism, different theoretical framework could lead to different outcomes.

Yu's work on *xiqu* was produced in the 1980s, a time of dramatic political change in the history of PRC. Prior to this, which is during the time of the "Cultural Revolution", commentators did not make adequate evaluation of classical *xiqu* plays, especially the official playwrights. Yu Qiuyu tried to make up this in a new historical background of post-Mao China. At the time where there was a need to review the ideological trends created during the "Cultural Revolution" decade, Yu's work on *xiqu* met the needs of the time. His evaluation of the classical *xiqu* playwrights met the expectations and was welcomed by the Chinese intellectual elite that had been bombarded with popular activities during the "Cultural Revolution".

However, Yu Qiuyu also went to the other extreme. He did not give the popular *xiqu* and *jingju* playwrights positive evaluation they deserved. Of course, this was not solely Yu Qiuyu's fault. At the time of the publication of his treatise, there had not been any strong evidence that revealed the characteristics of the nineteenth century *jingju* plays in the field of *xiqu* criticism. On the other hand, I have an

opportunity to examine the *Che Wang Fu* Repertoire after Yu published his work. This is the information that supports my studies, and it shows that there is a close relationship between methodology and resources.

Due to the important role of resources in the methodology, I have to point out that bias existed in Yu Qiuyu's treatment of his materials. Yu listed a total of twenty-three *chuanqi* playwrights with high official posts in the Ming dynasty, and he believed that the achievements of classical *chuanqi* plays were closely related to the social status and qualities of these playwrights.⁴⁸ As for the popular *xiqu* and specially *jingju* playwrights who rose during the mid-Qing, Yu simply dismissed them by saying that they just "selected and adapted".⁴⁹

Yu Qiuyu neglected the following issues. Firstly, for every theatrical troupe, whether they are *jingju* troupes or *kunqu* troupes, the phenomenon of "selecting and adapting" has always existed. Generally speaking, scholars like to use *chuanqi* plays as a representation of the achievements of *kunqu*. However, *chuanqi* plays cannot simply rely on the few playwrights within *kunqu* theatrical troupes for its creation. In the face of plays written by people of different social status, people did not deny the achievements of *kunqu* since *kunqu* troupes also need to "select and adept" their plays. In addition, people did not deny the unique characteristics of *chuanqi* plays because they were also adapted from novels and *Yuan zaju*. In fact, in the history of *xiqu*, plays of many first class playwrights were also adapted on the basis of the

⁴⁸ P.333

predecessors' works. Therefore, to deny the achievements of *jingju* plays on the ground of "select and adapt" is insufficient. The plays I will analyse are those can be "selected and adapted" and those that have already been "selected and adapted".

Secondly, Yu Qiuyu also neglected another issue. The writing of classical *kunqu* and *chuanqi* plays, which has lasted for more than a few centuries, could not have flourished if it were just by playwrights with high official posts. In fact, out of the twenty-three playwrights named by Yu Qiuyu because Yu thought they were important, there were very few that actually made valuable contribution to the development of the *xiqu* history.

Whether it is the creation of classical *chuanqi* plays or the newly arising *jingju* plays, the people that actually made greater contribution were a group of writers that were scholars who were not officials and intellectual elite but were inspired by the common people. The only difference is that the names of the classical *chuanqi* playwrights were attached to their plays and therefore in the record, while the nineteenth century playwrights often concealed their names or employed a pen name. Yu Qiuyu did not pay attention to this point and did not study the reasons behind it.

Therefore, we can see two extremes in Yu Qiuyu's works. On the one hand, he pushed the outstanding classical *xiqu* playwrights that were traditionally

⁴⁹ 448.

acknowledged and their plays to an extreme height, referring them as “the greatest playwrights”, “big masters of ideological culture” and “intellectuals with the highest culture attainments”. When Yu Qiuyu was highly praising the classical *xiqu* playwrights of official status and their works, he had unnoticeably wiped off the side of achievement of these playwrights that was inspired and derived from the ordinary people. Consequently, when he dealt with popular *xiqu*, the ones not signed by official and elite playwrights he sought evidence of under achievement and concluded that in the nineteenth century of China, there had not been one great playwright.

As for the regional theatre and *jingju*, the studies by Yu Qiuyu had no substance more than that by his predecessors. However, he had made many bold conclusions in this weak field. The plays of *jingju* used in Yu’s treatises, most were famous works in the history of *jingju*. However, Yu dismissed popular *xiqu* and ignored evidence and analysis by Jiao Xun, a Qing Dynasty *xiqu* commentator who had undergone the rise of popular *xiqu* and had seen the performances by the Anhui theatrical troupes, which showed positive evaluation of popular *xiqu*. Under Yu Qiuyu’s pen, the plays of popular *xiqu* did not reveal the “new concepts of the era” that are worth praising, but rather, only certain some folk moral codes ideas that seem to be “strengths” but could also be argued as “weaknesses”.

Because the research into the nineteenth century popular *xiqu* and *jingju* plays had always been weak, Yu Qiuyu’s bold conclusions also sounded reasonable and

hardly challenged. This is particularly so because it met the expectations and the assumptions of the Chinese intellectual elite who were just recovering from the Maoist radical popular onslaught. That is because “the common people” and “the mass” have, in the minds of these intellectuals, nothing worth praising. Consequently, Yu’s views have also been pushed to an extreme.

1.4 Several Cases of Terminology

The term *jingju* has always been translated into “Peking opera”. In this thesis, however, I use the word “*jingju*” except in direct quote from other scholars where “Peking opera” is used.

Di fang xi has always been referred to as “regional dramas” or “regional theatres”. In the present thesis, apart from using the phrase “regional theatres”, I have also incorporated the phrase “popular *xiqu*”, which has the same meaning. That is because when compared to the classical *kunqu*, *yingyang qiang*, *bangzi qiang*, *pihunag qiang* and other regional theatres at the time were more popular in style and easier to understand. At the same time, these different theatrical systems have already surpassed their regional nature and their coverage encompassed more than half of China.

On a final note, a key word in the present thesis is “equality”, which is used in love story play, courtroom play, frontier fortress play and history plays. I should make an

explanation to the meaning of this term. 'Equality' as used in this thesis refers to the ancient Chinese concept of '*deng gui jian*'. *Deng* means equal, *gui* refers to the upper class, and *jian* implies the lower strata. This phrase has two meanings. Firstly, it means that the human dignity of the upper and lower classes should be equal. Secondly, it also advocates desire and strife for the elimination of the hierarchical difference between the upper and the lower classes. In traditional Chinese society, equal relationships did not exist, and so this term was used as a slogan during uprisings of the masses. To a certain extent, there is a difference in the meaning between *deng gui jian* (literally meaning "equal noble with humble") and the Modern English word 'equality'. However, the Chinese term has always been used in literary works for many centuries.

Chapter Two:

The Decline of *Kunqu* and the Rise of Popular *Xiqu*

2.0 Introduction

Chinese theatre has a long history and is well established. Its origin can be traced back to the memorial ceremony in the thirteenth century BC. It took recognizable form during the Tang Dynasty, and its significant development began in the Song Dynasty. It grew and flourished with the changes to performing arts from being under complete government control to semi-government control and then to semi-commercialization, and later to full commercialization. Thus, Chinese *xiqu* history can be divided into three stages: before the Song Dynasty performing arts served polite society and were controlled by the government; followed by the stage of half government control and half commercialization from the Song Dynasty to the reign of Yongzheng Emperor in the Qing Dynasty; from the Qianlong Emperor to the end of Qing Dynasty, Chinese *xiqu* experienced the stage of full commercialization.

The first stage is the infancy of *xiqu*, and the second stage represents the period of classical *xiqu*. In the third stage, along with the rise of regional *xiqu*, clear and massive changes occurred to the performing arts; it is referred to as the period of popular *xiqu*.

In the mid-Qing Dynasty, classical *xiqu*, *kunqu*, gradually declined while popular *xiqu* upsurged. The focus of this chapter is to examine the reasons behind these changes in the history of *xiqu*. This chapter includes a brief history of Chinese *xiqu*, an analysis of some basic concepts, a discussion of the social background of the development of *xiqu*, and the reasons for the decline of *kunqu* and the rise of popular *xiqu*.

My analysis develops simultaneously with the introduction of the essential fact about, and basic concepts of, *xiqu*. I analyse the relationship of the different literary forms between classical *xiqu* and popular *xiqu*, the characteristics of different *xiqu* systems and their stable audience groups, and the socio-economic and cultural reasons for the changes

2.1 Classical *xiqu* and Popular *xiqu*

Chinese theatres can be divided into two large systems: classical *xiqu* based on the joined-song-form (*lianquti*), and popular *xiqu* based on the *banqiang*-form

(*banqiangti*).¹ In the two large systems, there are three dominant theatrical forms: 1)

¹ The system of joined-song-form (*lianquti*) has a large number of basic fixed-melodies in irregular-length lines, which are called *qupai* (song types). These *qupai* are usually arranged in a specific order in sets. Lyrics are written to these fixed-melodies for a given play. Composers or performers, depending upon the specific form of theatre, then compose precise, full melodies for the lyrics. This type of musical structure is called joined-song-form (*lianquti*): *lian* (to join) refers to the specific order in sets, and *qu* (song) to the fixed-melodies.

The system of *banqiang*-form (*banqiangti*) has its own patterns of modal identity and its own metrical types, which are combined with the speech-tones of the language in the composition of vocal music. This type of musical structure is known as *banqiang*-form (*banqiangti*); *ban* refers to metrical types, and *qiang* to both melodic-passages (*changqiang*) and modal systems (*shengqiang xitong*). English

Yuan zaju, 2) *Chuanqi*, and 3) *Jingju*. *Yuan zaju* and *chuanqi* belongs to classical *xiqu* and *jingju* is a representative form of popular *xiqu*.

Yuan zaju

The Yuan Dynasty was the golden age of *xiqu*. During this period, *Yuan zaju* (Yuan variety plays) was the dominant *xiqu* form. The term *zaju* refers to both the plays using this form, and the troupes that performed these plays.

The form of *Yuan zaju* was *sizhe yi xiezi* (four-acts and one “wedge”). The first act was the beginning of the story. The playwright could use this opportunity to tell the life experiences of the main characters and make oblique accusations. The moral of the play was always presented in this act. The second and third acts contained the development of the story. The third act usually presented the climax of the story, and so include most of the best songs in both content and language, while the fourth act was the conclusion. The “wedge” was always used as a prologue, which meant it could be put in between different acts, but never at the end.

The art of singing was greatly emphasized in *Yuan zaju*. Though the performances include singing, speaking and other components, singing was the most important component. The plays of *Yuan zaju* are usually divided into the *dan ben* (female character play) and the *mo ben* (male character play). The principal female character

reanslation consults Wichmann, Elizabeth's *Listening to Theatre*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii

only sing *dan ben*, while *mo ben* was designed to be sung by the leading male role. The other characters spoke either alone or in dialogue. Each act of the *Yuan zaju* division used one set joined-song, and each set joined-song used one tune. “The longest set joined-song comprised of twenty-six songs, and the shortest consisted of only three.”² The average number was usually between ten and twenty. Since the performance of these songs in *Yuan zaju* was virtually solo, and the leading role used four tunes to sing about sixty songs in one play, the performers had to possess excellent skills in singing.

Chuanqi

From the Ming to the early Qing Dynasties, the dominant *xiqu* writing form was called *chuanqi* (legend and romance). *Chuanqi* was developed from the *nanxi* (southern *xiqu*). *Nanxi* originated in the Song Dynasty from Wenzhou *xiqu* of Zhejiang province. But the term *nanxi* was, in general, referring to the plays of southern *xiqu* from the Song Dynasty to the mid-Ming Dynasty. It could also refer to the different types of southern *xiqu* of that time.

Ever since scholars began writing plays, the literary form of *nanxi* developed into a new form, *chuanqi*, from the reign of Chenghua (1466-1487) of the Ming Dynasty. The term *chuanqi* referred in particular to scripts. Just as different movie studios

Press, 1991.

² Wu Guoqin. (*Zhongguo xiqu shi manhua*) (*Talks on Chinese Xiqu*). Shanghai: Shanghai Wenyi Chubanshe, 1980, p. 91.

produce different movies based on the same script, different types of *xiqu* could also perform *chuanqi*. *Kunqu* was the most famous *xiqu* to perform *chuanqi*; the relationship between *chuanqi* and *kunqu* was closer than any of the other *xiqu*.

In the performances of *chuanqi*, all the actors sang, but most of the lyrics were sung by the main male and female characters.³ Since actors were encouraged to share the lyrics, performance was not as difficult as the solo performance in *Yuan zaju*. The length of the *chuanqi* plays were greatly increased by these multiple performers of *Yuan zaju*, sometimes even ten times the length.

Jingju

Jingju became another dominant theatrical form in the late Qing, along with the rise of the popular *xiqu*. Unlike the performances of *Yuan zaju* and *chuanqi*, *jingju* “singers are in fact consummate performers who act, sing, speak, dance, and often perform acrobatics as well.”⁴ One of the prominent characteristics of *jingju* was “fighting”. Westerners sometimes called *jingju* a “circus”, equating it with the ancient Roman athletics competitions and the modern performance of circus troupes. From one perspective, this showed that *jingju* was truly a combined art of singing and acting, which included fighting and acrobatics. The forerunner of *jingju* was the performances of the Anhui troupes. When an Anhui troupe performed *Mu Lian jiu*

³ Ibid. p. 164.

⁴ Wichmann, Elizabeth. *Listening to Theatre, The Aural Dimension of Beijing Opera*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1991, P. 1.

mu (*Mu Lian Saves His Mother*), they displayed all sorts of acrobatics, such as rope walking, somersaults and fire loops. These acts were extremely dangerous and thrilling. At the most dangerous and breathtaking moments, audiences cheered loudly. Once during such performance, the local government official thought the pirates had arrived and ordered his men to investigate, only to realize that it was just a theatrical performance.⁵

The second feature of *jingju* is the increase in dialogue in its plays, using vivid colloquial language. This made *jingju* more attuned to contemporary life. A Qing Dynasty scholar, Zhen Jun, held that “The language of *pihuang* (*jingju*) is extremely vulgar from the marketplace.”⁶ “Extremely vulgar” was a relative concept. For scholars of the Qing who experienced the change of aesthetic standards from *kunqu* to popular *xiqu*, it was normal for them to feel that *jingju*’s language was “vulgar”, because these scholars grew up under the influence of the classical poems and songs. However, the market place language was vivid and full of vitality, and it was suited to the rising theatrical form of comedy and laughing theatre, especially to the dialogue theatre, which had very little singing and lyrics.⁷ “Audiences broke into a

⁵ Zhang Dai. *Taoan mengyi* (*Taoan's Somniloquy*). In (*Shuoku*) (*Collection of Poem and Prose*), vol. 37-38. Shanghai: Shanghai Wenming Shuju, 1915, pp. 1-2.

⁶ Zhen Jun. *Tianshi ouwen* (*Information from Far Away*). Beijing: Guji Chubanshe, 1982, p. 174.

⁷ See the next chapter.

laugh heartily” and “praised in chorus”.⁸ This enabled *jingju* to win more and more audiences.⁹

The third feature is demonstrated in the creation of song lyrics. Traditional *zaju* and *chuanqi* use the joined-song-form. One joined-song-form represents one unit, and each unit usually consists of more than ten songs. *Jingju* uses the *banqiang*-form, where one unit comprises of one couplet. For example,

If I, Wu Yuan, could seek revenge,
A thousand tales would not be enough to thank you.

The couplet as a unit, which musically may be called a stanza or strain, is repeated as many times as dramatically necessary. Thus a long aria is simply an indefinite number of repetitions of the couplet or the strain.¹⁰ This allowed the playwright to freely manipulate the lyrics according to the plot, without being limited to a single song set.

Classical Xiqu Versus Popular Xiqu

⁸ Liu Liemao and Guo Jingrui, eds. *Qing Che Wang Fu chaocang quben zidishu (The Manchu Drum Songs in the Che Wang Fu Repertoire of the Qing Dynasty)*. Nanjing: Jiangsu Guji Chubanshe, 1993, p.342.

⁹ The language of *jingju* was product of combining colloquial with written languages. If we are to compare *jingju* plays with the plays of *zaju* and *chuanqi*, they did not have the Mongolian dialect as in *zaju* plays and the Suzhou dialect as in *chuanqi* plays. *Jingju* and novels together laid a solid foundation for the modern Han language. Today, when we read *jingju* plays in former days, the language of most of them has also become elegant.

The concept “*xiqu*”, which has no equivalent in English, is used to cover *zaju*, *chuanqi* and *jingju*. Although these three theatrical forms can be referred to as *xiqu*, the differences between them are still worth mentioning.

In the history of Chinese *xiqu*, *yuan zaju* was also called Northern *qu*, while *chuanqi* was named Southern *ci*. *Ci* and *qu* were two different Chinese poetic genres and both could be read and sung. *Ci* was popular in the Song Dynasty and *qu* was in vogue during the Yuan Dynasty. Both *Yuan zaju* and *chuanqi* were based on the joined-song-form of *ci* and *qu*. This enabled the performance of *Yuan zaju* and *chuanqi* to concentrate on singing, thus the saying “singing was the master, and speaking was the guest”.¹¹ Li Yu (1611-1679), a Qing playwright, director and theoretician of *xiqu*, attempted to break this principle, by reversing the importance of song and dialogue while on the whole upholding the principle of “singing was the master”.¹² Due to the relationship between song and dialogue, the creation of *chuanqi* script was always referred to *tian ci* or *tian qu* (composing songs).¹³ From the Ming to the early Qing, theatrical studies, commentaries and theories all concentrated on singing and songs, and used the term *qu* (song) to refer to *zaju* and *chuanqi*. For example, Wei Liangfu’s *Qu lun* (*The Rules of Xiqu*), Shen Chonglei’s *Du qu xuzhi* (*Notice to Composer and Singer*), Wang Jide’s *Qu lü* (*The Rules of Xiqu*), Shen Defu’s *Gu qu*

¹⁰ Pian, Rulan Chao. *Aria Structural Patterns in the Peking Opera. Michigan Papers in Chinese Studies*. No.19, 1975, P. 66.

¹¹ Li Yu. *Li liweng quhua* (*Li Yu’s Discussion on Xiqu*) Numerous explanations and comments by Chen Duo. Changsha: Hunan Renming Chubanshe, 1980, 1981, p. 86.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ See Qi Biaoqia. *Yuanshantang quping* (*Appreciation of Qu at the Yuanshan Hall*). In ZGXLJ, 6, p. 101.

zayan (*Random Thoughts of Appreciating Xiqu*), and Shen Fuzuo's *Qu lun* (*Comments on Xiqu*) etc.¹⁴ *Qu* became a synonymous with *Yuan zaju* and *chuanqi*. *Yuan zaju* was also called *Yuan qu*. The type of theatre that was closest to *chuanqi* was *kunqu*.

This characteristic is also reflected in the publication of *Yuan zaju* and *chuanqi* plays. Even now, large fonts are used for the songs while the dialogues are printed in smaller fonts. However, for *jingju* plays, both the song and dialogues are in the same size fonts, which demonstrates the equal importance of singing and speaking.

The importance of singing in *Yuan zaju* and *chuanqi* has led the audience to perceive them as 'an aural art'. Consequently, going to a performance of *Yuan zaju* and *chuanqi* was referred to as *tingxi* (listening to theatre), while the actors performing on stage was termed *changxi* (singing theatre). After the rise of the popular *xiqu*, *jingju* or other regional theatre performances were called *kanxi* (seeing theatre), while actors performing on stage were described as *zuoxi* (acting theatre). As a result, "*qu*" was no longer used for the new types of *xiqu* but replaced by "*ju*" (acting and speaking).¹⁵

The concentration of *Yuan zaju* and *chuanqi* on singing and *jingju* have more spoken dialogue are related to contemporary cultural developments. Chinese scholars have

¹⁴ All the works are in ZGXLJ.

¹⁵ See *Ju hua* (*Talking Theatre*) by Qing dynasty scholar Li Diaoyuan, in ZGXLJ. The title of the book use *Ju* not *Qu*.

always used verse to express their thoughts and feelings. For example, the representative form of literature for the Tang Dynasty was *shi* (poem), for the Song Dynasty it was *ci*, and for Yuan, *qu*. The joined-song-form was actually based on the arts of verses and the singing of Song *ci* and Yuan *qu*. The spoken dialogue in *jingju* went hand in hand with literary developments. Li Yu used Chinese literature and writing of historical events as examples. Historical records of pre-Qin dynasties only had a few lines for each event. From the Han Dynasty onward, the historical records developed from a few words to a few hundred words, from a few lines to a few hundreds of lines. However, the readers were not surprised at this increase in length. According to Li Yu, spoken dialogues in *xiqu* were lengthened in the same way. Li Yu also used the reduction of length in classical ballads and poems as examples to demonstrate the decrease of singing. The traditional style of ballads ranged from ten lines to thousands of lines. However, in the Tang Dynasty, each poem only had four or eight lines, but readers did not find them too brief. In the same way, the singing components in *xiqu* were also reduced.¹⁶ These tendencies in the development of Chinese *xiqu*, as argued by Li Yu, seemed convincing. However, the development in other aspects of literature that affected *jingju* and other types of popular *xiqu* remained neglected by Li Yu. During the Qing Dynasty, countless popular novels were published, overtaking the traditional position of verse. This was closely linked to the development of *jingju* and other types of popular *xiqu*, which increased spoken dialogues in their plays.

¹⁶ Li Yu. *Li liweng quhua* (*Li Yu's Discussion on Xiqu*) Numerous explanations and comments by

On the whole, the framework for the creation of *Yuan zaju* and *chuanqi* was built upon the verse form. Playwrights composed several series of joined-song-form, and performers only spoke when the need arose. The framework for the creation of *jingju* and popular *xiqu* plays were based on the prose form, and performers sang only when necessary. This was the main difference between the two.

This difference also determined the decline of one and the rise of the other. In the culture market of the Qing, the huge economic benefits received by popular novels had inevitably consigned classical verse to the “literary *salon*”. When the popular novel gradually overtook classical verse’s traditional position of dominance, this forecasted the inevitable decline of classical *xiqu* and the rise of popular *xiqu*.

2.2 *Ya Bu* (Elegant *Xiqu*) and *Hua Bu* (Popular *Xiqu*)

In the Qing period, Chinese *xiqu* was divided into *ya bu* and *hua bu* according to traditional aesthetic standards. *Ya bu* is *kunqu* which performs *chuanqi* plays, while *hua bu* refers to all other types of popular *xiqu* or regional *xiqu*. The literal meaning of *hua bu* is “flower *xiqu*”, with the connotation of “heterogeneous” and ‘sensationalism” as opposed to *ya bu*.

2.2.1 Elegant *Xiqu*: *Kunqu*

Kunqu was originally a regional *xiqu* popular in Kunshan of Jiangsu Province and nearby areas during the Yuan period. During the reign of the Ming Emperor Jiajing (11522-1566), *kunqu*, through the efforts of Wei Liangfu (dates of birth and death unknown) and Liang Chenyu (1521-94?), was enriched by absorbing the essences of other regional *xiqu*. Its high artistic achievement was quickly accepted by the upper class, and it soon came to be regarded as “elegant *xiqu*”. The productions of Tang Xianzu’s (1550-1616) *Linchuan simeng* (*The Four Dreams in Linchuan County*), and Shen Jing’s (1533-1610) *Jiugong pu* (*The Modes of Music of Southern Songs*) also helped establish *kunqu*’s dominance in theatrical circles.

The flourishing of *kunqu* is intimately linked to its birthplace, Kunshan County, located in the region of the Wu dialects, which now covers Shanghai in southeastern Jiangsu Province and most districts of Zhejiang Province. Geographical location and its physical characteristics may be seen as the initial historical determinants of any geopolitical entity. Jiangsu and Zhejiang in the South of China are very fortunate in this respect. Jiangsu and Zhejiang are located near the sea, which facilitated the prosperity of their salt industries; hence they became commercial regions very early. From the Grand Canal in the south to the port of Tongzhou in the north, their tribute and taxes continued to support the enormous expenditure of the dynasties of past ages. From the Song Dynasty (960-1279), the centre of society and the economy moved to the south of China from the north.¹⁷ During the Yuan Dynasty, after the Yuan ruler united the north and the south, the area to the south of the Changjiang

River attracted many people of different classes to make their livelihoods there.

Because the economy of the south was more vital than that of the north, “the south of the Changjiang River seemed to be a paradise.”¹⁸ This migration also carried with it an artistic component: the performers and playwrights of the north entered the Wu area in sufficient numbers to make an irreversible impact on southern courtly *xiqu*.

According to *Qing lou ji* (*The Collection of the Actresses*), many actresses moved to the south from the north in the late Yuan Dynasty. *Lu-gui bu* (*The Book of Ghosts*) recorded that famous playwrights such as Guan Hanqing, Ma Zhiyuan and Bai Pu also went to the south. Accordingly, the centre of *xiqu*, which had originally been in the north, moved southward into Jiangsu and Zhejiang provinces. *Kunqu* originated in this rich and populous area.

Jiangsu and Zhejiang Provinces, with their picturesque scenery, produced generations of famous performers, and also created a tradition of *xiqu*, particularly in Suzhou, not far from Kunshan. According to the Ming scholar Xu Wei (1521-93), Wu people were experts in singing and as early as Sui and Tang Dynasties, the imperial court chose actors from the Wu area.¹⁹ Performers from Suzhou could be found all over the country. Even as far away as the northwest, people could hear *kunqu*.²⁰ In Beijing during the Qing Dynasty, the street where the performers lived

¹⁷ Tuo Tuo. *Song shi* (*The History of the Song Dynasty*). 10 vols. Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1972, p. 10796.

¹⁸ Zhang Geng and Guo Hancheng, chief eds. *Zhongguo xiqu tongshi* (*A History of Chinese Theatre*). Beijing: Zhongguo Xiju Chubanshe, 1984, vol. 1, p.103.

¹⁹ Xu Wei. “Nanci xulu” (*Narrate South Xiqu*). In ZGXLJ, 3, p. 242.

²⁰ Kong Shangren. (*Kong Shangren shiwenji*) (*A Collection of Kong Shangren's Poem and Prose*). Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1962, p. 339.

was named “Suzhou Street”, and the guildhall of the *xiqu* in Yangzhou was called “Suchang (the singing of Suzhou) Street”. Li Yu believed that actresses must have been chosen from the Wu area.²¹ It was from this long tradition that the Wu area produced numerous highly skilled performers.²²

In training young *kunqu* performers, private theatrical groups (*jia yue*) deserve special mention. Private theatrical companies were owned by upper class and rich families. The main objective was to entertain the family members and welcome guests. The owners of the private theatrical groups usually had a good education in literature and were art connoisseurs. They also had a large amount of wealth to maintain their private theatrical groups. The private theatrical groups during the Ming and Qing Dynasties were usually passed on from generation to generation, for example, He Liangjun (1506-73), Wang Xijue, Shen Jing, and Zhang Dai’s (1597-1666?) theatrical groups.²³ This allowed performance techniques to continuously develop and improve. Some owners who had expertise in performance even taught their theatrical groups personally, for example, Ruan Dacheng (1587? -1646?) of the late Ming era, and Li Yu of the Qing era. Private theatrical groups were used for

²¹ Li Yu. *Li liweng quhua (Li Yu’s Discussion on Xiqu)* Numerous explanations and comments by Chen Duo. Changsha: Hunan Renming Chubanshe, 1981, p. 165.

²² In the reign of Wanli (1573-1619) of the Ming era, famous actors included Jiang Liu, Wang Jie, Yu Si, Gu Jun, Gu San, Chen Qi, Liu Ya, Li Jiugong etc. Famous amateur performers included Jin Wenpu, Wang Yian ect. At the end of Ming dynasty and early Qing dynastie, outstanding performers included Lu Shijiao, Xu Dasheng, Zhang Derong, Wu Qiyu, Zhou Tiedun, Sun Yanwang, Su Youzhan, Wang Zijia. Famous performers from private theatrical groups (*jia jue*) included Qiao Fusheng and Wang Zilai. Amateur performers included Peng Tianci, Ding Jizhi, Wang Shouxi, Su Kunsheng etc. In the Qing dynasty, famous actors emerged in an endless stream.

²³ Tan Fan. *Youling shi (A History of Chinese Performers)*. Shanghai: Shanghai Wenyi Chubanshe, 1995, p. 55.

artistic experimentation, producing a numbers of playwrights and theorists. For example, Shen Jing and He Liangjun were both theorists and playwrights, while Li Yu of the Qing Dynasty was a playwright, director and performer.

Throughout the history of *kunqu*, there were innumerable skilful performers, attracting many scholar-playwrights to create elegant plays to match the excellence of performing skills and the sophisticated music. Superb performances of outstanding plays made *kunqu* an elegant *xiqu* art. *Mudan ting* (*Peony Pavilion*), *Taohua shan* (*Peach Blossom Fan*) and *Changsheng dian* (*Palace of Eternal Life*) were all of epoch-making significance. Because of their quality, these famous *Chuanqi* plays spread throughout North and South China. The performances of *Peach Blossom Fan*, *Palace of Eternal Life* in Beijing during the early Qing Dynasty were overwhelmingly popular. After the performances in Beijing, almost every family was able to sing at least some piece songs of these plays. In the Qing Dynasty, *kunqu*, as the theatrical dominant form, was often called into the Forbidden City for performances. Therefore, *kunqu* became the elegant *xiqu* of the imperial court.

2.2.2 The Major Systems of *Hua bu*

The major systems of *hua bu* include *Yiyang qiang*, *Qin qiang*, *Pihuang qiang* and *Liuzi qiang*.

Yiyang qiang

Yiyang qiang originated in the Yiyang region of Jiangxi Province. It was formed during the late Yuan and early Ming Dynasties (the fourteenth century). It declined during the mid-fifteenth century (the period during the reign of the Ming Emperor Jiaqing), but revived during the seventies of the fifteenth century after Tan Lun reformed it.

Yiyang qiang was always performed in medium or small cities and towns, in the public square or *caotai* (small scantily equipped theatres). This contributed to the development of the most striking characteristic of *yiyang qiang*, the *bang qiang* (helping chorus). A performer would start singing and then several actors would take up the tune. Reliance on the helping chorus to increase sound volume and enhance atmosphere allowed audiences to hear the singing of the performers. *Yiyang qiang* was also called *gao qiang*. The term *gao* means singing in loud voice. The music of *yiyang qiang* was sonorous and resounding, a result of its performances in open areas.

During its development, the common people, particularly the peasant audiences, mostly supported *Yiyang qiang*. This contributed to another characteristic, the so-called *gun diao*, where a few lines in colloquial language were inserted to make the lyrics more comprehensible. *Yiyang qiang* always performed *chuanqi* scripts. “Because the language of the *chuanqi* was classical and intelligible only to the

educated, it was necessary to explain the words so that the masses could understand the drama.”²⁴ This made the play more acceptable for audiences with little education.

Yiyang qiang had great influence: it spread throughout most parts of China. There is evidence of *yiyang qiang* performance in provinces such as Anhui, Jiangsu, Fujian, Hunan, Hubei, Guangdong, Guangxi, Sichuan and Hebei. Furthermore, many local *xiqu* absorbed the quintessence of *yiyang qiang*, and subsequently formed the *yiyang* system. When *yiyang qiang* came to Beijing in the seventeenth century (approximately in late Ming and early Qing), a subgroup developed from it and was subsequently called *jing qiang* (*jing* means the Capital). *Jing qiang* still retained the *yiyang qiang*’s characteristics of sonorous and resounding singing. During the time of *jingqiang*’s high popularity in the early eighteenth century, many *kunqu* actors also learnt to perform *jing qiang* in order to secure more audiences.

Qin qiang (Clapper Xiqu)

The earliest form of *bangzi qiang* was *qin qiang*. The traditional view is that *qinqiang* originated from the Tongzhou region in Shaanxi Province (now Dali county), hence its name *Tongzhou bangzi*. After years of textual research, researchers now believe that *qin qiang* did not originate only from Tongzhou County, but from the triangular region between the borders of Shanxi, Shaanxi and

²⁴ Mackerras, Colin P. *The Rise of the Peking Opera*. London: Oxford University Press, 1972, p. 6.

Henan Provinces. This area included Tongzhou in Shanxi Province, Puzhou in Shaanxi Province and northwestern part of Henan Province. The earliest record of *qin qiang* was during the reign of the Ming Emperor Wanli (1573-1619), but it retained its status and maturity as a theatrical art until the late years of the reign of the Qing Emperor Qianlong.²⁵ *Qin qiang* spread far and wide and was very influential, subsequently forming a large system: *bangzi qiang* (Chinese local *xiqu* performed to the accompaniment of wooden clappers).²⁶ Since *qin qiang* was its earliest form, Qing scholars always used *qin qiang* to refer the system of *bangzi qiang*. By the early Qing Dynasty, *qin qiang* had already arrived in Beijing. Later, during the reign of Emperor Qianlong, another troupe of *bangzi qiang* entered Beijing and made an important impact there.

The greatest impression *qin qiang* made on the audiences was its music. Its conductor struck two pieces of hard redwood, *bangzi*, about thirty centimeters long, in order to strengthen the rhythm, hence its name *bangzi qiang*. Unlike the joined-song-form of the traditional *kunqu* and *yyang qiang*, *qin qiang* was the earliest of *banqiang*- form (*banqiang ti*) musical structure. When this unfamiliar type of theatre arrived in Beijing, how did the literati and officialdom that were so accustomed to

²⁵ See Liu Wenfeng. "Duoyuan heliu fenzhi fazhan - bangzi qiang yuanliu kao" (An Examination of the Origins of Biangzi qiang). In *Zhonghua xiqu (Chinese Theatre)*, no. 9. Taiyuan: Shanxi Renming Chubanshe, 1990, pp. 164-82.

²⁶ The north of the Yellow River had the Puzhou clapper, Daizhou clapper, Donglu clapper, Lao clapper, and Hebei clapper. In Henan province, the Yuxi clapper and Nanyang clapper were very popular in the western region, while Xiangfu tune and Hexi tune were performed in the eastern district Henan province; and Shandong province had the Caozhou clapper and Qingzhou clapper. Shaanxi province was divided into four regions: Tongzhou clapper (eastern region), Xian *luantan* (middle region), Xifu *qinqiang* (western region), and Handiao *guangguang*, also called Handiao *qinqiang* (south region).

the elegant tunes of *kunqu* feel? Liu Xianting (1648-1695) found the music of *qin qiang* very sad”.²⁷ Another Qing scholar, Zhen Jun, stated: “The sound of *bangxi qiang* was sorrowful, saddening its listeners. I just came back from South China and was shocked when I first heard such music. However, many of the literati and officialdom appreciated such sounds.”²⁸

Qin qiang was a modern type of musical theatre of the Qing Dynasty. The reason that literati and officialdom accepted its sorrowful music was that it conformed to the aesthetic standards of Chinese traditional culture. Chinese society had experienced a long history of tribulations. Particularly from the Song Dynasty onwards, Chinese experienced countless wars, which caused families to disperse different places. This had a great influence on the literary style of the literati and officialdom, making it gloomy and sorrowful: consequently, Chinese literati and officialdom tended to prefer solemn materials in literature and performing arts.²⁹ Whether the rhythm was beautiful or the melody was sorrowful, the music of *qin qiang* always exhibited a natural, unembellished, bold and unconstrained style. This was in diametrical contrast to the elegant and peaceful qualities of *kunqu*. *Qin qiang*’s music was able to express the grandest emotions of sorrow and grief. The flexibility of *qinqiang*’s music “had established a grand route for the development of Chinese theatre

²⁷ Liu Xianting. *Guangyang zaji (Guangyang Jottings)*. Punctuations by Wang Beiping, Xia Zhihe. Beijing:Zhonghua Shuju, 1957, 1985, p. 152.

²⁸ Zhen Jun. (*Tianshi ouwen*) (*Information from Far Away*). Beijing: Guji Chubanshe, 1982, p. 174.

²⁹ See author’s book, *Shenhua yu zhongguo wenhua suoying (Myths and Summary of Chinese Culture)*. Guangzhou: Huacheng chubanshe, 1993, pp. 180-85

music.”³⁰ In the history of *xiqu*, the emergence of *banqiangti* signified the arrival of a new aesthetic standard that was different from *kunqu* of the joined-song-form.

Pihuang qiang

Pihuang qiang is the combination of the two styles of *xipi* and *erhuang*. *Xipi* originated from *qinqiang*. In the early Qing Dynasty, *qinqiang* spread to Wuhan, through the Xiangyang region in Hubei Province, the local people combining their regional tunes with *qinqiang* and forming the style of *xipi*. The people of Hubei called lyrics “*pi*” (“skin”), therefore, the term “*xipi*” was given to *qinqiang*, which came from the west (*xi*).

The origin of *erhuang* is more complicated. One of the theories is that it came from the two counties of Huanggang and Huangbi in Hubei Province, accounting for its name: *erhuang* (the tunes of two-Huang counties). Another theory suggests that *erhuang* originated in the county of Yihuang in Jiangxi Province, whilst Anhui Province was yet another proposed origin for *erhuang*. The question is complex, but the fact that Jiangxi, Hubei and Anhui are neighboring provinces indicates indisputably that *erhuang* originated at the intersection of these three provinces.³¹

³⁰ Zhang Geng and Guo Hancheng, chief eds. *Zhongguo xiqu tongshi* (*A History of Chinese Theatre*). Beijing: Zhongguo Xiju Chubanshe, 1984, vol. 3. p. 87.

³¹ See Su Yi. *Jingju erbainian gaikuang* (*A Survey of Two Hundred Years of Jingju*). Beijing: Beijing Yanshan Chubanshe, 1990, p. 9.

During the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, the two styles of *erhuang* and *xipi* combined to form a new theatre: *pihuang qiang*. Some of the most famous styles of *pihung qiang* were *Han xi* (Hubei *xi*), and *Anhui xi*. The tunes of *Han xi* were predominantly based on *xipi* assisted by *pihuang*. While the tunes of *Hui xi* were mainly *erhuang* with *xipi* a supplementary style. During the mid-nineteenth century, *Han xi* and *Anhui xi* combined in Beijing to form *jingju*, which became one of the most influential styles in the system of *pihuang*. Therefore, the term *pihuang* was sometimes used to refer to *jingju*.

Liuzi qiang

Liuzi qiang is one of the *xiqu* systems often overlooked by scholars. However, it is an essential component of the history of Chinese *xiqu*, and in the development of *jingju*. *Liuzi qiang* originated in Shandong Province in the early seventeenth century, and was popular throughout Shandong, Jiangsu and Henan Provinces. It was based on folk songs that were popular in the North, encompassed a large variety of folk cultures which were of beneficial influences on *jingju*. In particular, many of the folk songs were adopted by *jingju*. *Huang Ying Er* (*Oriole*), *Wa Wa* (*The Baby*), *Shan Po Yang* (*Goats on the Hill*) were some of the most frequently used tunes in the early stages of the development of *jingju*. *Jingju* in its early stages always used *liuzi* tune in the play of *Xiao guafu shangfen* (*The Little Widow Goes up to a Grave*).

Each of the five *xiqu* systems described above originated in a different part of China; *kunqu* originated in south China; *yyang qiang*, in the south, but during the early Qing Dynasty, it became very popular in Beijing and was called *jing qiang*. *Bangzi qiang* was found in the west, and *liuzi qiang* came from the east. Thus the common saying, “southern *kunqu*, northern *yyang qiang*, eastern *liuzi qiang*, and western *bangzi qiang*.” *Pihuang qiang* developed later to become highly popular.

During the era of Qing, in these five major *xiqu* systems, *kunqu* was the elegant *xiqu*. Most *kunqu* performers were members of the upper-class private theatrical groups, and the audiences of *kunqu* were predominately upper-class government officials. Like the *kunqu*, *yyang qiang* also performed *chuanqi* plays and belonged to the system of joined-song-form. Since most of the audiences were common people, *yyang qiang* popularized the plays of *chuanqi* through the use of *gundiao*. In the Qing Dynasty, *yyang qiang* always performed at the Imperial Court. Although it is classified as *hua bu* when compared to *kunqu*, it was more elegant than other *hua bu xiqu* such as *bangzi qiang*, *pihuang qiang* and *liuzi qiang*, etc. The audiences of *hua bu* were mainly ordinary people.

Since *hua bu* and *ya bu* both had their stable audience groups, the changes that occurred to these audience groups must have led to the rise and decline of various theatre types. During the Qianlong period, *yabu*'s *kunqu* was the first to lose its predominance in Beijing, followed by *yabu*'s quasi-elegant *yyang qiang*, which was replaced by *qin qiang*. What was the social background during their decline?

2.3 The Social Background of the Qing Dynasty

The Qing Dynasty was a period of prosperity for *xiqu*. The booming economic conditions created a favourable condition for the development of *xiqu*. The era's rich academic atmosphere and the grand scale of cultural development also had a positive influence on *xiqu* activities. Furthermore, *xiqu* was one of the hobbies of the emperors, another factor favourable to its development.

2.3.1 Economy and *Xiqu*

In the early Qing, Empress Xiao Zhuangwen and Emperors Kangxi, Yongzheng and Qianlong were “clear-headed” and ambitious. Their common aim was to promote agriculture. Emperor Kangxi encouraged land reclamation, and the government tamed the Yellow River and surveyed the agricultural land of the country. His son, Emperor Yongzheng, repeatedly stated, “Agriculture is fundamental for a nation.”³² Again and again he commanded officials to pay attention to agriculture matters, and to be prepared for various calamities. He also exhorted them to be concerned about the welfare of the peasants.³³ Emperor Yongzheng even laid great stress on forestry and animal husbandry, and advocated that people should plant trees and raise pigs and sheep for their daily consumption.

³² Zheng Yimei. *Qingong jiemi (Revealing the Inside Story of the Court of the Qing Dynasty)*. Hongkong: Nanyi Chubanshe, 1988, p. 39.

³³ Ibid. p. 39.

With the development of agriculture, the commercial economy began to develop. Many handicraft industries and commercial cities were becoming more and more prosperous, such as Guangzhou, Nanjing, Hankou, Xiamen, which flourished more than in the Ming Dynasty. “The growth of commercialism not only appeared in industry and commerce of South-east coastal cities, but also spread elsewhere. Many businessmen gathered in the four big commercial cities: Beijing, Foshan, Suzhou and Hankou.”³⁴ Businessmen from Anhui and Shanxi spread all over the country. Yangzhou, Suzhou, Nanjing and Guangzhou became the most flourishing cities. Beijing, as capital city and commercial center, also increased in prosperity.

The resumption and development of the agricultural and commercial economy created advantageous material conditions for theatrical activities. The big cities became the focus of *xiqu*. According to the Qing scholar Miu Quansun, during the reign of Kangxi, music, singing and banquets continued day and night in Beijing. Many wealthy men maintained their own private theatrical groups of about twenty performers. Artistic markets in metropolises like Beijing drew huge crowds of people. “The court thronged with horse carriages and the theatre seated more than one thousand spectators”.³⁵ In South China, Yangzhou was a key city of *xiqu*. According to the Qing scholar Li Dou, different types of *xiqu* and troupes and many famous actors came to Yangzhou. Chen Yunjiu was ninety years old, but still

³⁴ Liu Liemao and Guo Jingrui, eds. *Qing Che Wang Fu chaocang quben zidishu (The Manchu Drum Songs in the Che Wang Fu Repertoire of the Qing Dynasty)*. 4 vols. Nanjing: Jiangsu Guji Chubanshe, 1993, p. 340.

performed magnificently on the stage.³⁶ The famous *qinqiang* actor Wei Changsheng also came to Yangzhou to perform and teach performing skills. “Wei Changsheng was given 1,000 taels for one scene he performed.”³⁷ Clearly, only economic development could lead the ferment of *xiqu* activities.

2.3.2 The Influence of Cultural Development on *Xiqu*

The grand scope of cultural undertakings in the Qing also influenced *xiqu* significantly. The first few emperors in the Qing Dynasty thought highly of Han culture. Both Emperor Kangxi and Qianlong all established a great academic institution to compile books, gathering and sorting Chinese culture of ancient times. Book publishing in the Qing Dynasty reached unprecedented heights. Over one hundred twenty six thousand six hundred and forty-nine titles, in total one million seven hundred thousands books were published. This is more than twice the total publication from the Han (206BC-220) to the Ming (1368-1644), a period extending over nearly two thousand years. The ancient books and valuable records formed the basis for the compilation of a large-scale collection: *Gujin tushu jicheng* (*A Collection of Ancient and Modern Books*), the largest collection of titles in the Qing Dynasty according to Kang Youwei.³⁸

³⁵ *Ping kun lun* (*Comments on Shi Yukun*) in the Che Wang Fu Repertoire,

³⁶ Li Dou. *Yangzhou huafang lu* (*Record of Pleasure Boats in Yangzhou*). Yangzhou: Jiangsu Guangling Guji Kejinshe, 1984, p. 126.

³⁷ *Ibid.* p. 126.

³⁸ Feng Tianyu, He Xiaoming and Zhou Jiming. *Zhongguo wenhuashi* (*The History of Chinese Culture*). Shanghai: Shanghai Renming Chubanshe, 1994, p. 857.

The grand scope of this cultural undertaking was beneficial to the development of *xiqu*, and it was in such an atmosphere that some new full-length series of grand plays were produced. For example, *Shengping baofa* (*Peaceful Raft*), *Quanshan jingke* (*Golden Rule for Advocating Virtue*), *Dingshi chunqiu* (*The Three Kingdoms*), *Zhongyi xuantu* (*The Water Margin*) and *Zhaodai xiaoshao* (*The Yang Family Generals*) were performed for the first time in the Imperial Court. These plays were all drawn from popular novels. Each of the plays had ten volumes, with every volume comprising twenty-four scenes. It required ten days to perform one of these grand plays with one volume was performed per day.

2.3.3 Patronage of the Theatre by the Imperial Court

The interest taken by the rulers of the Qing nobility was another favourable factor in the development of *xiqu*. The Qing Emperors and their wives and concubines not only liked to see *xiqu*, but also to perform. Emperors Xianfeng, Tongzhi and Guangxu were interested in *xiqu*, and Cixi Empress Dowager (1835-1908) loved it even more. According to the musician Xu Lanyuan, Emperor Guangxu was good at beating drums, and could act too. At a birthday celebration for Empress Dowager Cixi, rose and went on stage to perform *Huanghe lou* (*The Huanghe Tower*).³⁹

³⁹ Ma Shaobo, Zhang Lihui, Tao Xiong, Zeng Bairong and Hu Bo et. al. (eds). *Zhongguo Jingju shi* (*A History of Jingju*). Beijing: Zhongguo Xiju Chubanshe, 1990. p.126.

The Qing emperors were also enthusiastic seekers and of theatrical talents. When Emperor Qianlong made his inspection tour of Jiangsu and Zhijiang Provinces, “once he found talented *kunqu* actors, he ordered the Suzhou Weaving Bureau to select them and send them to Beijing.”⁴⁰ In 1860, Emperor Xianfeng ordered his officials to choose actors from the regional theatre to his *xinggong* (holiday palace). In 1883, Emperor Guangxu ordered selected folk actors to go to Beijing to prepare for the celebration of the fiftieth birthday of Empress Dowager Cixi. After the celebration, these actors passed on performing skills to eunuchs. Choosing folk actors became a convention and the number of such actor increased significantly. Until 1908, most famous actors in Beijing were summoned to the imperial court to teach the eunuchs performing and theatrical skills. This was beneficial to the enhancement of the quality of *xiqu*.

During the reign of Qianlong, several large-scale performances also contributed to improvement in quality. During Emperor Qianlong’s inspection tours of Jiangsu and Zhijiang Provinces in 1751, 1757, 1762, 1765, 1840, 1844, “according to usual practice, the salt merchants administrative office of Lianghuai⁴¹ enlisted *hua bu* and *ya bu* to prepare to put on performances for greeting the Emperor.”⁴² Large-scale performances were the fashion for the celebration in 1751 of the sixtieth birthday of the Empress Dowager. According to the Qing scholar Zhao yi, there was a stage

⁴⁰ Zhang Geng, chief ed. *Zhongguo dabaikewanquanzhu – xiqu quyi* (Encyclopaedia of China: *Xiqu and storytelling*). Beijing, Shanghai: Zhongguo Dabaikequanshu Chubanshe, 1983, p. 160.

⁴¹ Including Jiangsu, Anhui, Jiangxi, Hubei, and Hunan provinces.

⁴² Li Dou. *Yangzhou huafang lu* (Record of Pleasure Boats in Yangzhou). Yangzhou: Jiangsu Guangling Guji Kejinshe, 1984, p. 1.

within every ten steps from Xihua gate to Gaoliang Bridge outside Xizhi gate in Beijing.⁴³ The celebrations of the eightieth birthday of Empress Dowager (1771) and the eightieth birthday of Qianlong Emperor (1790) also included large-scale performances. Regional theatres from different provinces met in Beijing to participate in these performances, and later competed with each other for audiences. These celebrations produced favourable conditions for the exchange of ideas between the regional *xiqu*.

2.4 The Decline of *Kunqu* and the Reasons behind the Rise of Popular *Xiqu*

However, not every system or type of *xiqu* was able to develop under these favourable conditions. As mentioned previously, Chinese performing arts underwent three stages. The Qing era was a turning point in the history of Chinese *xiqu* in its final stage. The administrative system of the performing arts moved from semi-government control and semi-commercialization towards full commercialization. This was an advantageous factor for the development of theatre, and in creating competition. *Kunqu* based on the joined-song-form obviously had its weaknesses and subsequently gradually declined. At the same time, popular theatre took advantage of this condition and began its development.

⁴³ Zhao Yi. *Yanbao zaji* (Miscellany of Yanbao). In *Biji xiaoshuo daguan* (An Overview of Literary Sketches), no.33. Taipei: Xinxing Shudian Youxian Gongsi, 1987, vol. 33. p. 10.

2.4.1 Changes of the Administrative System of the Performing Arts

Performers in Ancient China

In traditional Chinese society, the main source of performers were the families of prisoners, war captives or poor families. Military prisoners became slaves or servants. Some were selected to become performers or musical instrument players. After training, these people, male and female, were registered to “*guanji*” (official musician-prostitute) or “*yuehu*” (musical households). For example, in the Yuan era (1279-1368), Mongol rulers took captives as slaves and *yuehu* after they conquered the Central Plains in China. When the Yuan Dynasty was overthrown, Mongolian captives were in turn registered as *yuehu*.⁴⁴

Criminals’ families were also often registered as *yuehu*. The *Wei shu* (*The History of the Wei Dynasty*) of the Five Dynasties stated, “For robberies and murders, the main criminal and the accessory criminal both shall be punished. Their wives and children shall be registered as *yuehu*.”⁴⁵ The *Che Wang Fu* Repertoire contains the following story: in 1398, Zhu Yuanzhang (1328-1398), the founding emperor of the Ming Dynasty, died. Since his eldest son Zhu Biao had died in 1392, his eldest grandson

⁴⁴ Anonymous. *Sanfeng shiqian ji* (*The Record of Three Customs and Ten Sins*). In (*Xiangyanlou congshu* (*The Collection in the Xiangyan Building*)). No. 2. Shanghai: Guojia Fulunshe Yinshe, 1909, vol. 2. p.1.

⁴⁵ Wei Shou. *Wei shu* (*The History of the Wei Kingdom*). 8 vols. Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1974. p. 2888.

ascended the throne and was called Emperor Jianwen. Emperor Jianwen felt that most of his uncles did not respect him, so he gave orders to weaken their military power. This caused the rebellion of his uncle Zhu Di, also known as Prince Yan. Zhu Di's troops captured Nanjing, which was the capital city at that time, and ascended the throne as Emperor Yongle. Emperor Jianwen had a highly respected minister, Fang Xiaoru, whom the Emperor Yongle forced to write an imperial edict to reassure the public. Fang Xiaoru refused to write it and scolded Emperor Yongle severely. Emperor Yongle ordered Fang's tongue to be cut out and his teeth taken out; but Fang was still unyielding. Therefore Emperor Yongle had him and his clan executed.⁴⁶ The story was from *Mingshi-fang xiaoru zhuan* (*History of Ming Dynasty-Biography of Fang Xiaoru*). According to this biography, "Fang Xiaoru, and several hundred of clan members, relatives and friends were executed."⁴⁷ While Emperor Yongle massacred civil officials and military officers who did not yield to him, their families were banished to remote Shanxi and Shaanxi Provinces and were registered as *yuehu*. Another example occurred during the late Yuan Dynasty to early Ming Dynasty. Due to the hostility and fighting between Chen Youliang (1320-1363) and Zhu Yuanzhang, Chen Youliang's subordinate nine clans, Chen, Qian, Lin, Li, Yuan, Shun, Zhao, Xu and He, were made *yuehu*.

⁴⁶ See *Caozhao qiaoyia* (*Refused to Write Imperial Edict and all the Teeth Were Taken out*), in Liu Liemao and Guo Jingrui, eds. *Qing Che Wang Fu chaocang quben zidishu* (*The Manchu Drum Songs in the Che Wang Fu Repertoire of the Qing Dynasty*). Nanjing: Jiangsu Guji Chubanshe, 1993, pp. 97-102.

⁴⁷ Zhang Tingyu. *Ming shi* (*The History of the Ming Dynasty*). 28 vols. Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1974, p. 4020.

Once a family was registered into *yuehu*, it was passed on from generation to generation. Even with a change of dynasty, *yuehu* remained *yuehu*.⁴⁸ They and their descendants were disqualified from taking the imperial examinations or marrying out of their caste.⁴⁹

The trained official musician-prostitutes and *yuehu* were often sent to serve in the Imperial Court and different levels of officials, or were granted to upper class officials as members of private music troupes. In the Tang Dynasty, government officials could be granted actresses. Volume 34 of the *Tang Huiyao (A Collection of Important Events in the Tang Dynasty)* records, “In 685, officials of high government post are to be granted a group of actresses, while official of medium government posts are to be granted three actresses.” “In 751, the Emperor granted actresses to officials of medium government posts or higher, to form private musical troupes.”⁵⁰ The members of these private musical troupes were provided by the government and their costs were also paid by the government. When Emperor Zhu Yuanzhang established the Ming Dynasty, he granted “all princes each one thousand and seven hundred volumes of *xiqu*.” In 1402, the Emperor gave all princes a *yuehu* each. In 1426, Prince Zhu Quan was granted a *yuehu* consisting of twenty-seven actresses.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Tuo Tuo. *Song shi (The History of the Song Dynasty)*, 10 vols. Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1972, pp. 3347-48.

⁴⁹ Jones, Stephen, *Folk Music of China*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1995, p. 78.

⁵⁰ See Tan Fan. *Youling shi (A History of Chinese Performers)*. Shanghai: Shanghai Wenyi Chubanshe, 1995, p. 47.

⁵¹ Yu Qiuyi. *Zhongguo xiju wenhua shisu (A History of Chinese Theatre Culture)*. Changsha: Hunan Renming Chubanshe, 1985, p. 279.

Changes of the Administrative System of Performing Arts

Prior to the Song Dynasty, professional performers of music, singing, dancing and theatre were almost all official musician prostitutes or *yuehu*. They were all under government control and served the upper classes. The performing arts were not for commercial purposes. The infrequent entertainments offered to people were not of a commercial nature. The reasons are the size of the cities and their population's consuming power at that time could not sustain organization of professional performing arts. Therefore, during wars, official musician prostitutes of Imperial Court were scattered in different places. They often could not support themselves using their performing skills. Their only way out was to marry businessmen,⁵² or seek shelter in an upper-class government official's mansion and become a member of the private musical troupe. Even folk performing artists and acrobats were also unable to form professional troupes. Some of the outstanding performers were similarly turned into exclusive performers for the upper class. Therefore, up until the ninth century, the performing arts were almost fully controlled by government officials. In 819, "Emperor Tang Xianzong, out of economic considerations, permitted official musician prostitutes to perform to the society."⁵³ However, this kind of "performance" was often an accompanying dancing and musical

⁵² Zhang Geng and Guo Hancheng, chief eds. *Zhongguo xiqu tongshi (A History of Chinese Xiqu)*. Beijing: Zhongguo Xiqu Chubanshe, 1984, vol.1. p. 35.

⁵³ Xu Jun and Yang Hai. *Jinü zhuan (The Biographies of Prostitutes)*. Shanghai: Shangha Wenyi Chubanshe, 1995, p.46.

performances during banquets. Although this led to the subsequent blossoming of folk arts, folk arts still remained at the embryonic stage.

Sine the Song Dynasty, the situation changed. The capital during the Northern Song Dynasty was Dongjing (now Kaifeng of Henan Province), and the capital city during the Southern Song Dynasty of Linan (now Hangzhou of Zhejiang Province), were both commercial cities with populations exceeding one million. At the time, there were more than fifty countries and regions that had trade relations with China. The commercial prosperity enabled China to become the first country to use paper money. Furthermore, compass, gunpowder and rocket were the important scientific achievements of this period. Classical sciences, such as geology, medicine, metallurgy, ship-building, textile and pottery making, all made outstanding achievements. People who created this classical civilization, also created their aesthetic standards and entertainment requirements. Thus, the performing arts developed from government control and service to the upper class to become half government owned and half commercially operated. Various kinds of folk arts such as story telling, *shuochang* (the genre of popular entertainment consisting mainly of talking and singing), *xiqu* and short story rapidly flourished.

After the Song Dynasty, apart from the official prostitutes and musical households, commercialized theatrical troupes appeared. Members of private musical troupes no longer solely depended on the rewards provided by the government. Official, landlord, merchants, whoever had the money could buy children from poor families

and train them especially for private theatrical troupes. In the Yuan Dynasty, government officials such as Kuanchebuhua, Yang Zi, and Gu Aying etc. all had numerous private theatrical troupes, including singing, dancing, *xiqu* and other different styles, living in their mansions.⁵⁴ In the Ming Dynasty, as the art of *kunqu* matured, private theatrical troupes also flourished. Even merchants refused to lag behind and owned their own private theatrical troupes. During the late Ming Dynasty for instance, there was a rich man named Zhu Bilun. Every time he came home, his private theatrical troupe would play music to welcome him.⁵⁵

The different kinds of theatrical organizations and their performance including commercialized theatrical troupes, official musician prostitutes, musical households and private musical troupes mentioned above, can be divided into two categories. The first is of a commercial nature, and commercialized theatrical troupes belong to this category. The other is of a non-commercial nature. Both Imperial theatrical troupes and private theatrical troupes were non-commercial. Official prostitutes and musical households controlled by different levels of local governments often had to accept all official, non-commercial performances, and also make commercial performances that were taxable.

⁵⁴ Tan Fang. *Youling shi (A History of Chinese Performers)*. Shanghai: Shanghai Wenyi Chubanshe, 1995, p. 47.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* p. 50

The abolition of official musician-prostitute and musical household systems in the Qing Dynasty led to changes in the administrative system of performing arts.⁵⁶ This new policy consisted of a series of measures undertaken by Emperor Shunzhi (1644-1661), Emperor Kangxi (1662-1722) and Emperor Yongzheng (1723-1735). In 1653 and 1661, Emperor Shunzhi ordered that the Imperial Court no longer use the official musician prostitute. Thereafter, performances held in the Imperial Court were performed by eunuchs and official musician prostitutes no longer existed in the imperial court. In 1673, Emperor Kangxi abolished the official musician prostitutes for local authorities. Thereafter, authorities at different levels no longer had official musician prostitutes.⁵⁷ In the period 1723-1725, Emperor Yongzheng ordered all musical households to be eliminated from society. In 1723, Minister Nian Xi advised Emperor Yongzheng to abolish musical households because of their pitiful condition. Emperor Yongzheng agreed and ordered the Ministry of Propaganda to draw up a plan. The Ministry of Propaganda advised the abolition of the musical households of Shanxi and Shaanxi Provinces. Other provinces should also abolish similar types of musical households according to the plan. Emperor Yongzheng approved his plan. This policy received enthusiastic support of the people. "Once the system was abolished, musical households shed tears of joy."⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Early in the Ming Dynasty, Emperor Xuande once took measure to abolish the official prostitute system, but such measure was short lived.

⁵⁷ Xu Jun and Yang Hai. *Jinü zhuan (The Biographies of Prostitutes)*. Shanghai: Shangha Wenyi Chubanshe, 1995, p Chubanshe, 1995. p. 76.

⁵⁸ *Huangchao wenxian tongkao (General Examination on Documents of Imperial Dynasty)*. See Xu Jun and Yang Hai, Chubanshe, 1995. p.80.

Thereafter, in order to solve the problems arising due to the covert musician prostitute and discipline the government officials, preventing them from corruption and living extravagant lifestyles, the Qing emperors also abandoned private theatrical troupes. In 1724 and 1769, Emperors Yongzheng and Qianlong issued prohibitions that banned government officers to keep private theatrical troupes.⁵⁹ In the early nineteenth century, Emperor Jiaqing further prohibited government officials and alternate official in Beijing from going to the theatre.⁶⁰ In 1828, Emperor Daoguang prohibited government officials from hiring theatrical troupes to perform in their mansion.⁶¹ Since the nineteenth century, many government officials were transported to distant places for penal servitude as a punishment for performing or watching theatrical performances. Among the most prominent were Heshun, Chunling, Alonga, high-ranking officials, and Kundule, of royal descent.⁶² These were unprecedented events.⁶³

The above series of measures not only abolished the official musician-prostitute and musical households systems that had more than one thousand years of history, but also stopped a disguised form of the official musician system, that is, the private theatrical troupe living in the mansion of high-ranking officials. These measures had helped the Qing government in making large cost savings. Meanwhile, it also eased

⁵⁹ Wang Xiaochuan. *Yuan Ming Qing sandai jinhui xiaoshuo xiqu shiliao* (*The Historical Information of the Banned and Destroyed Novels and Plays during the Yuan, Ming and Qing Dynasties*). Taipei: Heluo Tushu Chubanshe, 1980, p. 28. p. 43.

⁶⁰ Ibid. p. 57.

⁶¹ Ibid. p. 67.

⁶² Ibid. p. 55, 56, 58, 65, 70, 71.

the burden on taxpayers. As stated in the prohibition in the fourth year of Emperor Jiaqing's rule, "If government officials permanently own private theatrical troupes in their mansion, this is a very serious matter. It is the same as using taxpayers' money to support government officials' entertainment expenditures."⁶⁴

At the same time, the above series of measures led to an era of radical changes in the *xiqu* world. Official management and control of actors and theatrical troupes disappeared from all provinces, and commercial theatres gradually supplanted them. Theatrical performance gradually became commercialised. Henceforth, though wealthy businessmen overtook the traditional position of the upper class officials and owned private theatrical troupes, the nature of these troupes had changed. Their members were no longer granted by the imperial court, and the court was no longer responsible for any financial expense. The members of these private theatrical troupes were brought through commercial dealings.

Unfortunately, the abolition of the official musician prostitute system did not radically change the fates of the performers. The traditional discrimination against performers was unchanged. The Qing government still enforced the rule that actors were not allowed to enter the imperial examinations. This policies was enforced throughout the Qing period right until the end. Since *xiqu* and actors were still

⁶³ Henceforth, the upper-class government officials, though prohibited from entering the theatre, still tried many different ways of watching *xiqu*. Often, a group of government officials got together and hired a number of outstanding actors to perform in a specified place. This is called *tanghui*.

considered degraded and not engaged in honest work,⁶⁵ The Qing government not only prohibited Manchu to enter theatres, it also did not allow Manchus to become actors. A prohibition in 1825 stated, “Any Manchu person who makes a living as performer on stage due to poverty is a disgrace to his nationality. He and his descendants must be expelled from their nationality.”⁶⁶ The series of measures above catalyzed the decline of classical *xiqu*.

2.4.2 The Decline of *Kunqu* and *Chuanqi*

As the administration system of performing arts became fully commercialized, classical *xiqu* began to give way to popular *xiqu*. Under the traditional system of semi-government control and semi-commercialization, the reason that *kunqu*, which originated in southern China, was able to prosper in northern China was largely due to the traditional private theatrical troupes. These private theatrical troupes traveled from southern China to Beijing with their owners who had secured official positions in the capital city. After the private theatrical troupes were banned, one of the main foundations for *kunqu* virtually disappeared. Furthermore, many owners of private theatrical troupes were also playwrights and *xiqu* commentators. The private theatrical troupes were the essential laboratories for *kunqu* arts. The experiments included performing arts, the creation of plays, and theatre related criticisms. When

⁶⁴ Wang Xiaochuan. *Yuan Ming Qing sandai jinhui xiaoshuo xiqu shiliao* (*The Historical Information of the Banned and Destroyed Novels and Plays during the Yuan, Ming and Qing Dynasties*). Taipei: Heluo Tushu Chubanshe, 1980. p. 50.

⁶⁵ Ibid. p. 54.

⁶⁶ Ibid. p. 67

private theatrical troupes were banned and officials were prohibited from entering theatre, this also caused the decline in the creation of *chuanqi*.

On the commercialized stage, *kunqu* also lost its superiority. The over-refined plays and elegant performances, which suited the highly educated upper class, gradually became alienated from the interests of the common people. *Kunqu* perform *chuanqi* plays. *Chuanqi* are based on the joined-song-form of *ci* and *qu*. *Ci* originated in the late-Tang Dynasty, and prospered in the Song. *Qu* was popular in the Yuan. From late-Tang to the early Qing, *ci*, a poetic genre, experienced a history of nine hundred years and *qu* also had a history of more than three hundred years. They had become classical antique forms and both had a whole set of special vocabulary. Verse that departed from this set of vocabulary and was based on colloquial language was usually termed ragged verse. *Ci* and *qu* had different styles during different eras. During the Ming and Qing, refinement and implication was the style of those eras.⁶⁷ Playwrights could not deviate from the contemporary *ci* style. In other words, they could not use an archaic literary form to write a popular play.

As increasingly aging artistic forms, the strong points of *chuanqi* and *kunqu* were becoming their weaknesses. *Chuanqi* and *kunqu* formed a whole that could not be separated. This synthetic whole, over time, was becoming *siban* (rigid old form). *Siban* was a musical concept, signifying metrics of songs, and the number of words and meters of music in *kunqu* that cannot be changed. “*Siban*” is the opposite of

”*huoban*” which means flexible. A “*huoban*” song means that the number of words and meters can be changed. *Kunqu* both used southern and northern songs. “The southern songs were designated as *siban* and the northern songs were *huoban*. At first the southern songs were also flexible, but during the reign of Wanli (1573-1619) in the Ming Dynasty, Shen Jing (1533-1610) revised the meter and rhythm, and set the *siban* rule. His *The Modes of Music of Southern Songs* is the earliest musicological text for *kunqu* stipulating this rigid distinction.”⁶⁸

Shen Jing, a government official, was dismissed from the Imperial Court for some minor infraction of etiquette. He returned to his home in Wujiang County, Jiangsu Province, where he spent the next thirty years studying southern songs and publishing his *Modes of Music of the Southern Songs*, a selection of 719 southern songs, which were noted for their rhythm, libretti and music meters. His nephew Shen Zijin revised it and added new content. The book played a crucial part in guiding the standard of *chuanqi* creation. Shen Jing and his Wujiang School had many similarities to the pioneers of Western opera - the Camerata. The Camerata’s goals were to revive the musical style used in ancient Greek drama and to develop an alternative to the highly contrapuntal music of the late Renaissance. Specifically, they wanted composers to pay close attention to the texts on which their music was based, to set these texts in a simple manner, and to make the music reflect, phrase by

⁶⁷ Liang Rongji. *Cixue lilun zongkao (A Textual Criticism of Ci Theory)*. Beijing: Beijing Daxue Chubanshe, 1991, p. 246

⁶⁸ Liu Guojie and Dongfang Yinyue Xuehui (The Society of Eastern Musics), eds. *Zhongguo mingzu yinyue daxi - xiqu yinyue juan (The Chinese National Music- Xiqu Music)*. Shanghai: Shanghai Yinyue Chubanshe, 1989, p.11.

phrase, the meaning of the texts. Shen Jing and his Wujiang School emphasised that playwrights and composers should coordinate with each other. They demanded that playwrights create their libretto in accordance to the ancient pattern, which kept the ancient musical style and set the texts in a simple manner, making the songs easier to sing by the actors. However, as time passed, Shen Jing's rules became chains.

As an integrated artistic system, *kunqu* found it almost impossible to embrace new styles and ideas. The early days of *kunqu* had been full of vitality and bold in making innovations, but its vitality faded when it became the dominant form of *xiqu*. While popular *xiqu* collected folk songs to invigorate their productions and make them accessible to a wider audience, *kunqu* was prevented from doing this because by doing so it would compromise its classical style. As a result, *kunqu* was unintelligible to the mass audience. *Kunqu* could not debase its aesthetic standards by using the expedient of *gundiao* - short explanatory comments inserted at various points - that was used in *yiyang qiang*. Therefore, "even the audiences of the Jingsu and Zhejiang Provinces, the birthplace of *kunqu*, felt that the libretti of *kunqu* were too difficult to understand."⁶⁹

During the reign of Qianlong Emperor, *kunqu* was showing a tendency to decline. *Kunqu* first lost its influence in Beijing. Even in its birthplace in the south, it also lost most of its position. The Qing scholar Jiao Xun (1763-1820), who resided in

⁶⁹ Zhou Yibai. *Zhou Yibai xiju lunwenxuan (Selected Essays on the Theatre by Zhou Yibai)*. Changsha: Hunan Renming Chubanshe, 1982, p. 206.

Yangzhou stated, “If the audiences did not read the original script, they would have no idea of the content of the *kunqu* plays.”⁷⁰ Whenever *kunqu* was performed in Yangzhou common people always dispersed in a hubbub. Audiences would rather watch other popular *xiqu*, because they are easier to understand. When *kunqu* was performed in the imperial palace, there was an “*andian ben*”, a manuscript written especially for the Emperor and Empresses to read, which aided in understanding the content.⁷¹

In addition, *kunqu* experienced severe setback during the “Taiping Rebellion” (1851-1864). The leaders of the “Taiping Army” advocated a popular literary style that was simple and easy to understand. Therefore, *kunqu* completely lost its superiority in the South.⁷² Even though *kuqun* was once popular in Shanghai by the late Qing, *kunqu* finally lost its dominance in South China while there appeared to be a gradual shift of influence of *jingju* to the south.

2.4.3 The Rise of Popular *Xiqu*

The audience of popular *xiqu* consisted mainly of ordinary people, and merchants were the main consumers. In the Qing Dynasty, businessmen gave full play to their

⁷⁰ Jiao Xun. *Huabu nongtn (Chatting about Regional Theatres with Peasants)*. In ZGXLJ, 8. p.225.

⁷¹ Zhu Jiajin. “Qingdai luntan xi zai gongzhong fanzhan de youguan shiliao” (*Information about Luntan Theater developed in the Court of the Qing Dynasty*). Appendix in Ma Shaobo *Zhongguo Jingju shi (The History of Jinju)*. Beijing: Zhongguo Xiju Chubanshe, 1990, p. 643.

⁷² See Mackerras, Colin P. “Theatre and Taipings.” *Modern China*, vol. 2, no. 4 (October 1976): 473-501.

importance in theatrical activities. When more and more ordinary people became consumers of theatre, they facilitated the popularization of *xiqu*.

The Effects of Businessmen and Commercial Factors on Popular Xiqu

In traditional Chinese agricultural society, the common people were divided into four categories: scholar, peasant, worker and businessman. The businessman was at the bottom of all class levels. Rulers often inhibited commerce in order to prevent merchants from gaining control of the national economy. Although businessmen had wealth, they lacked political status. Along with the development of a commercial economy during the Ming and Qing Dynasties, the social status of businessmen started to was change. A Ming scholar He Yiyin tried to re-arrange the order of the four stratum: scholar, businessman, peasant, worker. The circumstance in the Qing Dynasty had also changed. Even Emperor Yongzheng knew that the real social status of businessmen was much higher than that of the scholars. This raised deep concern amongst the orthodox scholars at the time.⁷³

The wealth of businessmen allowed them to become the ones with the greatest opportunity to enjoy *xiqu*. When the businessmen of Shaanxi and Anhui Provinces, the salt merchants of Jiangsu, Anhui, Jiangxi, Hubei and Hunan Provinces, the export traders of Guangdong Province, and the rice and cloth merchants of different

⁷³ Feng Tianyu, He Xiaoming and Zhou Jiming. *Zhongguo wenhuashi (The History of Chinese Culture)*. Shanghai: Shanghai Renming Chubanshe, 1990/1994, P. 898.

provinces, engaged in trade in other places, they would always bring with them their own local troupes to perform in the commercial guild hall. "Since merchants often lived away from their home province, they created a demand in their new home for styles of drama familiar to their native towns."⁷⁴ As new social stratum without much education, the merchants preferred the popular theatre, particularly the *xiqu* of their native land. This provided the conditions for different regional *xiqu* to spread beyond their regions and enter various large cities.

In promoting *xiqu*, businessmen, with their changing social status, begun to replace officialdom's positions, and took on a crucial position in theatrical activities. As mentioned above, a number of large-scale theatrical activities took place during the Qianlong period. Commercial associations of different regions played important roles for supporters and organizers. These large-scale theatrical activities also provided great opportunities of commercial operations. Therefore, businessmen were also the beneficiaries of these theatrical activities. In the Qing Dynasty, the government issued several prohibitions on building theatres. The joint operation between *xiqu* dealers and owners of teahouses and restaurants meant that theatrical performances were held in teahouses and restaurants instead. This not only avoided violating the prohibitions, it also enabled *xiqu* to expand to different corners of people's lives. In 1824, Emperor Daoguang once again issued a prohibition on building theatres. At the time, there were approximately ten theatres in Beijing.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Mackerras, Colin P, *The Rise of the Peking Opera*, London: Oxford University Press, 1972, p. 19.

⁷⁵ Feng Tianyu, He Xiaoming and Zhou Jiming. *Zhongguo wenhuashi (The History of Chinese Culture)*. Shanghai: Shanghai Renming Chubanshe, 1994, pp. 898-99.

During the Tongzhi period (1862-1874), however, there were more than forty theatres in Beijing. Although it was against the prohibition, theatrical activities had changed from previously consuming large amounts of government funds to providing the government with more and more taxes. It was this that altered the emperors' attitudes towards *xiqu*. During the late-Qing Dynasty, theatre was gradually standardized. This standardization broke the relationship between *xiqu* banquets and other extravagant but wasteful activities and it also created greater opportunities for more ordinary people to enjoy *xiqu*.

The Increase of Population and the Role of Xiqu in People's Lives

The increase in population in the Qing Dynasty also created a much higher demand for *xiqu*. In the Han Dynasty (206 B. C. -220 A. D.) the recorded Chinese population was 60 million, and for the next one thousand years the population was relatively stable. However, during the mid-Qing Dynasty, the population soared dramatically and by the reigns of Emperors Qianlong and Jiaqing, the population reached about three hundred million, increasing to four hundred million in the reign of Daoguang Emperor.⁷⁶

In its history of a few hundred years, *xiqu* played an important role in people's lives. It was an important component of festive celebrations and sacrifices to gods and ancestors, and it was also the highest synthesis of the various art forms available,

before the inventions of film and television. Every year, many *xiqu* troupes not only had to perform in the cities, but after the harvest, the busiest time of the year, they also traveled to many different small towns and villages to perform for the townspeople and peasants. The Qing scholar Jiao Xun stated that in his youth he went to see the village *xiqu* with his father. Only the day before, *kunqu* had been given and received with little enthusiasm by audience. When actors of popular *xiqu* came on the stage for *Qingfeng ting* (*Qingfeng Pavilion*), “Everybody clenched his teeth in anger, but later they were all very happy. When the cymbals and drama stopped, everyone looked at each other quietly...When they went home, they talked about it for more than ten days.”⁷⁷ From Jiao Xun’s record, we can see that popular *xiqu* had evoked great repercussion in the village. This great repercussion also indicated the potential of popular *xiqu*.

Against this background, the few types of *xiqu* of the Yuan and Ming Dynasties rapidly turned into many different *xiqu* styles, and spread throughout the whole country from the mid-Qing. These popular *xiqu*, though coarse and immature, was full of vitality of the era and thus grew strongly. This was, since the golden age of *Yuan zaju*, the third flourishing development for *xiqu* in China. Amongst the rise of various kinds of regional theatres, *jingju* was an outstanding case.

⁷⁶ Gu Hongting. *Zhongguo jindai shi* (*A Modern History of China*). Taipei: Sanmin Shuju, 1994, p. 5.

⁷⁷ Jiao Xun. *Huabu Nongtan* (*Chatting about Regional Theatres with Peasants*). In *ZGXLJ*, 8, p. 227. English retranslation consults Mackerras, Colin P. *The Rise of the Peking Opera*. London: Oxford University Press, 1972.

2.5 Conclusion

As Chinese *xiqu* developed from the Yuan Dynasty (the golden era) to the late Qing era, two main types emerged. One was classical *kunqu* based on the joined-song-form of *ci* and *qu*, and the other one, popular *xiqu* based on the music structure of *bangzi*-form. *Kunqu* developed during the period, when classical verse played a dominant role in the history of Chinese literature, while popular *xiqu* developed at the historical stage when popular novels gradually overtook the dominant position of verse. The Qing era witnessed the new system replaced the old. It was inevitable for the verse-based classical *xiqu* to be replaced by popular prose-based *xiqu*.

Both classical *xiqu* and popular *xiqu* had their stable audience groups. Most of *kunqu*'s audiences were upper-class government officials, while popular *xiqu* was watched mainly by ordinary people. As changes occurred to the audience groups, this also led to the decline of *kunqu* and the rise of popular *xiqu*.

The first cause of these changes is the abolition of the official musician-prostitute and musical household policies. In order to prevent government officials from living extravagant but wasteful lifestyles, the Qing government also prohibited officials from owning private theatrical troupes. The implementation of these measures, on the overall scale, eliminated the non-commercial factors of *xiqu* performance, and thus allowed the performing arts to be fully commercialized. *Kunqu* developed and prospered under semi-government control and semi-commercialization. As the

performing arts gradually became fully commercialized, the weaknesses of the art of *kunqu* were unavoidably exposed. This classical antique form of *xiqu*, suitable for upper class audiences and traditional private theatrical troupes, lost its competitive edge.

The supporting pillars for the *xiqu* of Ming and Qing Dynasties were two different social forces. In the Qing Dynasty, the development of a commercial economy changed the social status of merchants. As the upper-class government officials were prohibited from entering the theatre, businessmen began to take over government officials' traditional position and became the main consumers and supporters of *xiqu*. As more and more middle and lower class people became consumers of *xiqu*, their education levels ultimately determined that they chose the popular style, and thus promoted the prosperity of popular *xiqu*.

As a representative form of classical *xiqu*, the decline of *kunqu* was unavoidable. At the same time, the rise of popular *xiqu* revealed that theatre follows changes in artistic trends and aesthetic standards. In comparison, classical *xiqu* seemed rigid (*si ban*) and too archaic to change. However, popular *xiqu* was called "*luantan*" ("vulgar") due to the immaturity of their artistic skills, which is dealt with in the next chapter.

As the leading genre of the *qu* form, *kunqu* was distinctly a product its times and underwent various metamorphoses because of socio-economic and literary changes.

Nonetheless, it was an essential musical bridge between pre-Ming concepts of operatic style and post-Ming developments. It provided a classical model for *jingju* to expand further the potentialities of a total art, incorporating music, dance, literature, and drama.⁷⁸

⁷⁸ Liu, Marjory Bong-ray. *Tradition and Change in Kunqu Opera*. An authorized facsimile was produced by microfilm-xerography in 1979 by University Microfilms International Ann Arbor, Michigan, U.S.A. London, England, 1976. P. 57.

Chapter Three

“*Luantan*” Art and the Marketplace Plays

3.0 Introduction

As the administrative systems of the performing arts became fully commercialized, different types of regional and popular *xiqu* rose quickly. This chapter will deal with the period from the rise of regional and popular theatres to their maturity, referred to, in the history of *xiqu*, as the “*luantan*” period, which may be translated as “chaotic play”. The early *jingju* plays were also considered as *luantan*.

As a theatrical concept, *luantan* in the beginning was used to refer to a musical accompaniment that provided a special effect of music played by stringed instruments.¹ It was not used in a derogatory sense. However, due to the unusual effect of the music, in the course of time it became a derogatory word, meaning “play a musical instrument in disorderly way.” It was transferred to refer to regional theatres and carried the meaning of “chaotic plays”, because there was no established framework to describe the emergence of varieties of regional plays. One thing to point out is that this kind of “chaotic play” also displays another side of regional theatre: the breaking of traditions and its tremendous vitality.

The *luantan* period started in the reign of Kangxi when *qin qiang* was named *luantan*², and ended at the time *jingju* took the traditional place of *kunqu* as the dominant *xiqu* during the late Qing Dynasty.

Why was *jingju* referred to as *luantan* for even longer than other regional theatre, and what are the characteristics and achievements of the early *jingju*'s *luantan* plays? These topics are to be explored in this chapter. A clear idea of early *jingju*'s *luantan* art will help us understand the different types of plays written in the that period, which are an important feature of the development of *jingju* towards a significant art form.

In the first section of this chapter, I will review the formation of *jingju*. In the second section, I will analyse how the *luantan* art of *jingju* is different from traditional *kunqu* in two aspects. Firstly, different genres were performed on the same stage in the one program and even different music systems were used in the same play. Secondly, the performance was either mostly singing or dialogue, or acrobatic fighting. This genre was clearly distinguished from traditional *kunqu*. However, the vitality of the so-called *luantan* art was soon to show. The weakness of early *jingju*, in other words, its *luantan* aspect, turned out to be its strengths.

¹ Meng Shufan. *Zhongguo banshi bianhuati xiqu yanjiu* (A Study of Chinese Banshi Music Xiqu). Taipei: Wenjin Chubanshe, 1991, p. 195.

² Liu Xian Ting (1648-1695) recorded: "In Shanxi province, there was a new tune called *luantan*, and it was extremely loose and sorrowful." This refers to a new type of theatre *qin qiang* from the north-

In the third section, I will examine the early *luantan* plays. *Jingju* plays during its infancy (1790 – 1840) were mostly marketplace plays and *danjiao aiqing xi* (love story play with a female leading role). In this section, I will focus mainly on the analysis of marketplace plays, which have hitherto been ignored by scholars. These plays not only aid our understanding of the *luantan* art in the early stage of *jingju*, they also play an undeniable role in the history of *jingju*. Marketplace plays mostly depict miscellaneous matters of the marketplace and display features of the ordinary people. Their form is similar to that of spoken drama. This style, or the so-called “chaotic” tendency, which is also completely different from that of the classical *xiqu* during those years, subsequently changed traditional aesthetic standards.

3.1 From the Performance of the Anhui Companies to *Jingju*

Jingju’s predecessor was Anhui *xiqu* from Anhui Province, which was once popular in Southern China. At the end of the Ming Dynasty and the beginning of the Qing Dynasty, some local theaters such as Huizhou Theatre and Qingyang Theater under the influence of *kunqu* formed the *kunyi qiang* (*kunyi* tune), which mixed the style of *kunqu* and *yyang qiang*. Later, *kunyi qiang* and *qin qiang* from North-western China influenced each other and many new tunes were created, such as *chui qiang* (blow tune), *bozi qiang* (*bozi* tune), and *erhuang qiang* (*erhuang* tune) at Tongcheng and Shidai (now Shitai) in Anhui Province. These new tunes were together called *Anhui*

western provinces, which was considered of inferior quality. See Liu Xianting. *Guangyang zaji* (*Guangyang Jottings*). Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1985, p. 152.

xi (Anhui theater). *Erhuang qiang* was the main tune and later became the basic and most important tune in *jingju*.

Prior to 1790, when the first Anhui troupe, Sanqing, came to Beijing, *Anhui xi* came into contact with the *xipi qiang* (Hubei theatre). The origin of the *xipi qiang* is western *bangzi qiang*, as has been mentioned in the Chapter Two. When *xipi qiang* spread to Anhui province, it also became a main tune of *Anhui xi*. Since *xipi qiang* and *erhuang qiang* are the two main tunes of *Anhui xi*, *Anhui xi* and *jingju* at its early time were both called *pihuang qiang*, an abbreviation of *xipi qiang* and *pihuang qiang*.³

In 1790, the first Anhui troupe led by Gao Langting was invited to Beijing to perform at Emperor Qianlong's birthday celebration. Anhui businessmen sponsored this theatrical troupe. "When this Anhui troupe was in Yangzhou, they mainly performed *erhuang qiang*, but they also performed a variety of *kunqu*, *chui qiang*, *siping qiang*, *bozi qiang* and so on."⁴ At the beginning the leader of this troupe was Yu Laosi, followed by Gao Langting. Gao Langting (1774-?) used to play the female role and performed in Hangzhou, Yangzhou and many other places when he was young. Later he became the leader of the Sanqing Troupe and was also appointed

³ According to "Waijiang liyuan huiguan beiji" (A Record of Events of Clubhouses from Other Provinces), In Guangdong Province of 1840, there were eight Anhui troupes among the fourteen theatrical troupes from other provinces. These Anhui troupes were also called *pihuang qiang*. Evidently, prior to the first time when Sanqing Anhui troupe entered Beijing in 1790, the Anhui troupes in the South had already combined the tunes of both *xipi* and *erhuang*, and were once very popular in the southern provinces. See Zhang Geng, chief ed. *Zhongguo dabaike quanshu-xiqu quyi juan* (Encyclopaedia of China: Xiqu and Folk Art Forms). Beijing: Zhongguo: Dabaikequanshu Chubanshe, 1983, p. 159.

head of the “Jingzhong Temple”, which was a society of Beijing actors. He died after 1827. His most famous play was *Shazi chengqin* (*The Marriage of a Blockhead*).

The Anhui troupes, Sixi, Chuntai, Hechun, Qixiu, Nicui, Siqing and Wuqing troupes in succession followed Gao Langting’s Sanqing troupe to Beijing.⁵ Sanqing (Three celebration), Sixi (Four joys), Chuntai (Spring stage) and Hechun (Harmonious spring)⁶ were generally referred to as the “four great Anhui companies” (*Sida huiban*).

After the Anhui troupes had entered Beijing, they also drew some actors from the *jing qiang* and *qin qiang*. According to *Yangzhou huafang lu* (*A Record of Pleasure Boats in Yangzhou*), “After Gao Langting went to Beijing, he combined Anqing *huabu* with *jing qiang* and *qin qiang* and formed a troupe named Sanqing. The previous *jing qiang* troupes such as Yiqing, Cuiqing, Jisui all drifted into obscurity.”⁷ The troupe was named Sanqing to celebrate the alliance of the three theatres Anqing *huabu*, *jing qiang* and *qin qiang*. The Anhui troupe, Chuntai “also invited famous actors, performers of female roles, from everywhere.”⁸

⁴ Ibid. p. 158.

⁵ Wu Tongbing, Zhou Yaxun, chief eds. *Jingju zhishi cidian* (*A Dictionary of Jingju Knowledge*), Wu Xiaoru, foreward. Taijing Renming Chubanshe, 1990, 1991, p. 3.

⁶ The words “Four Joys”, “Spring Stage”, “Harmonious Spring” are from Colin Mackerras, *Jingju*, Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1997, p. 5.

⁷ Li Dou. *Yangzhou hua fang lu* (*A Record of Pleasure Boats in Yangzhou*). Yang Zhou: Jiangsu Guanglin Guji Keyinshe, 1984, vol.5. p. 125.

⁸ Ibid.

With the recruitment of many talented actors, “the four great Anhui troupes” developed unique characteristics. Yang Maojin, a scholar of the Qing Dynasty, noted that Sixi was best at singing *kunqu*. Sanqing was best at serial plays and often performed “new plays that described current events.” Hechun was unique at the acrobatic fighting. It often performed plays based on novels such as *Sanguo yanyi* (*The Romance of the Three Kingdom*) and *Shuihu zhuan* (*Water Margin*). Chuntai’s use of children in theatre was excellent and it was often praised for their children’s theatre, which used a vast array of dazzling colours, and exuded youthful vibrancy.⁹ Sixi retained the classic style and elegance of *kunqu*. These four great Anhui theatrical troupes all developed their own unique expertise and complemented each other.

During the reign of Daoguang (1821-1850), the actors Wang Honggui and Li Liu from Hubei Province came to Beijing and performed with the Anhui troupes on the same stage. This helped to bring about the second combination of the *xipi qiang* and the *erhuang qiang*, which finally became the main musical tunes of *jingju*. Between 1840 and 1860, there were great changes and developments in the tunes, plays, performances and the line-up of the actors. Therefore, when *jingju* was initially formed, it was called *pihuang ju*, with *pi* from *xipi* and *huang* from *erhuang*.

During the middle period of the reign of Guangxu emperor (1875-1908), the language style of the great actor Tan Xinpei (1847-1917), which was based on

⁹ Yang Maojian. *Menghua suobu* (*The Record of Regional Theatre and Performers*). 1 vol. 1842. In

Hubei dialect, was a combination of the Zhongzhou rhyme and the Beijing accent. This subsequently influenced the language of *jingju*. Later, this style was spread by students from the *Xiliancheng* professional *xiqu* training school to produce, finally, unification of *jingju*'s accent and rhymes. The musical and linguistic systems were the basic factors that differentiated one *xiqu* genre from another. Before Tan Xinpei, there were different ways of pronunciation in the *pihuang ju*. Cheng Changgeng (1811-1879) used the accent of Anhui Province; Yu Sansheng (1802-1866) used a Hubei provincial accent; and Zhang Erkui (1814-1860) used the Beijing accent. If a type of *xiqu* had continued to be pronounced in different ways, there might have been a gradual formation of three sub-genres within the *pihuang* system. But Tan's pronunciation style resulted in the unification of the language of *jingju*, which was another major step that secured *jingju* its position as a type of *xiqu*.

The above was an outline of how *jingju* was formed by the Anhui troupes. The history of the early *jingju* is the history of the Anhui troupes. *Anhui xi* "dominated Beijing's stage for more than half a century and played an important role in linking the past with the future in the history of the Chinese theatre."¹⁰ The characteristic of the Anhui troupes was their "combination of various types of theatres from the different regions." They already had many local tunes before they entered Beijing, and they combined with *jing qiang* (*yiyang qiang*) and *qin qiang* after they entered Beijing. Thus the formation of *jingju* was based on the *erhuang qiang*, *xipi qiang*,

QYLS, 11. p. 6.

yyang qiang (*jing qiang*), *qin qiang* (*bangzi qiang*), and *kunqu*, which were of main tunes of the time.

It is worth noting that on the one hand, *jingju* utilised the main tunes described above to enrich itself during its developments, while on the other hand, it gradually established the *pihuang qiang* as its main musical tune. Therefore, *jingju* was a type of *xiqu* under the *pihuang* system. Why was this type of *xiqu* also called *jingju*? The term *jingju*, *jing* is short for Beijing, and *ju* means theatre. If a type of *xiqu* was named by a geological place, normally it should be performed using the dialect of that region. However, *jingju* never really used the Beijing dialect or Mandarin in its performances. As explained above, even though Tan Xinpei had unified the language to be used in *jingju* performances, the unified language was not the Mandarin. In fact, the language used in *jingju* performances was a special language comprising dialects from the Anhui, Hubei and Beijing. This kind of theatrical language could not be found anywhere in real life, like the fictitious dragon.

During the late-Qing, as the performing skills of the Anhui troupes matured, they began to move south and perform in places such as Shanghai. Since these theatrical troupes came from Beijing, the Shanghainese called them *jingju* or *jingxi*. Thereafter, Beijing *pihuang* was called *jingju*. During the period of the Republic of China, as

¹⁰ Wang Zhongjiu. *Time Honored Huiju Opera*, in *China & the World Cultural Exchange*, edited by Editorial Office of *China & the World Cultural Exchange*, published by *China & the World Cultural Exchange*, No.4. 1999, p. 24.

the capital city of China moved to Nanjing and Beijing was then named Beiping, *jingju* was called *pingju* for a period of time.

Given that *jingju* never truly used Mandarin in its performances, it was remarkable that it was accepted by the people of Beijing and was even renowned as the *guoju* or the national *xiqu*. This demonstrated the huge success *jingju* had in China's theatrical circles. However, its success only came about after enduring a long period when it was merely "luantan art".

3.2 *Jingju* and *Luantan* Art

In the history of Chinese *xiqu*, *jingju* was referred to as *luantan* longer than other regional *xiqu* because it underwent a long process, which could be described from two perspectives: the combination of different *xiqu* genres, and the characteristics of folk arts. It was these two factors that made *jingju* the most powerful type of *xiqu*.

3.2.1 Combination of Different *Xiqu* Genres

As the Anhui troupes used many different *xiqu* tunes in their performances, the scope of the tone and music of *xiqu* became wider and different types of *xiqu* came to be performed on the same stage. The performance of an Anhui troupe could involve a *kunqu* as its first program; a *bangzi qiang* its second program; and a *xipi qiang* its third same stage.

As a result of different types of *xiqu* programs being performed at the same time, the Anhui troupes developed by using different types program. Even different types of *xiqu* programs were performed at the same time on one play. *Jiu lian deng* (*The Nine Lotus Lantern*) was a typical play from the *Che Wang Fu* Repertoire. It described an old servant Funu, who was determined to save his old master. Funu experienced many difficulties. He entered hell to borrow the nine-lotus lantern, which he used to protect his master from a fire. This play was rearranged from Zhu Zuochao's *chuanqi* play of the same name in the Qing dynasty.¹¹ The whole play had twelve sections, of which the first section was in *kunqu* and *pihuang qiang*. The fourth section was totally devoted to *kunqun* while other sections used *pihuang qiang*. Another example is the play *Xiang lian pai* (*Lotus Handkerchief*), which also had twelve sections. The first three sections were in *kunqu*, and the last nine sections were in *pihuang qiang*. There were many other similar plays in the *Che Wang Fu* Repertoire. For example, *Meiyu pei* (*A Marriage in a Closet*) was a traditional *jingju* play, written by a late Qing playwright.¹² It includes tunes such as *kunqu*, *bangzi qiang*, *pihuang qiang*, and *chui qiang*.

¹¹ The *Quhai zhongmu* (*Xiqu Dictionary*) noted, "This script was created recently. The figures and events were a complete fabrication. The key plot was how Funu borrowed the lantern, hence its name." See Guo Jingrui, Chen Weiwu et al. *Che Wang Fu quben tiyao* (*Summary of the Che Wang Fu Repertoire*). Guangzhou: Zhongshandaxue Chubanshe, 1989, p.251. In addition, *Zhui bai qiu* (*A Collection of Play Pieces*) had collected four scenes of *The Nine Lotus Lantern*. See *A Collection of Opera Pieces*, Wanhua zhuren and Qian Dechang ed, Taipei: Taiwan Xuesheng Shuju Yingyin, pp. 3719-49.

¹² *Zhongguo xiqu quyī cidian* (*Dictionary of Chinese Xiqu and Chinese Folk Art Forms*). Shanghai: Shanghai Cishu Chubanshe, 1981, p. 604.

Because the performance of Anhui troupes contained many different tunes from different types of *xiqu*, it is difficult to classify the Anhui troupes. If the Anhui troupes were to be classified as *pihuang qiang*, it would be hard to explain their extensive use of *kunqu* and *bangzi qiang* in their programs. The stage language of the Anhui troupes remained not unified for a long period, because different dialects were used in the performance. As time passed and the circumstances changed, people often believed that the type of *xiqu* of the Anhui troupes was *pihuang ju* or *jingju*. However, the actors of the Anhui troupes of the Qing Dynasty were confused about which type of *xiqu* they belonged to. In 1863, the Sixi Troupe declared to the government that they were a *qinqiang* troupe. Later in 1866, the Shuangsun Anhui Troupe also declared itself as a *qinqiang* troupe. Until 1877, Sixi and Chuntai never bothered about which type of *xiqu* they belonged to. As Anhui troupes combined different types of *xiqu* into their programs and gradually mixed them together, they also gradually lost their uniqueness and could not be classified as an *Anhui xi*. For this reason, it is difficult to find a word to label the combination of different types of *xiqu*. Furthermore, the performers from different backgrounds performed different types of *xiqu*. When the relationship between these performers became strained, the troupes readily split. Therefore, the Anhui troupes could be only labelled *luan tan*, i.e. a chaotic situation. In the index of *Shengpingshu* Mansion's 1908 collection of plays, there were more than three hundred plays under the category of *luan tan*.¹³ These plays were all in *pihuang ju*. Since the Anhui troupes did not specify their

¹³ Zhu Jiajin. *Qingdai luntanxi zha gongzhong fazhande youguan shiliao* (Information about Luntan theatre developed in the Court of the Qing Dynasty). The article appeared as an appendix

own type of *xiqu*, *luantan* meant exclusively *pihuang* in the Forbidden City during this period, unlike earlier *luantan*, which meant all types of *xiqu* other than *kunqu*.

3.2.2 The Characteristics of Folk Arts

In the early days of *jingju*, the performance of many plays consisted mostly of singing, dialogue, or fighting, which made folk arts the special feature of Anhui troupes.

Play in Dialogue

In the early periods of *jingju*, there was a type of play called *baikou xi* (dialogue theatre), which had only dialogues with no songs and lyrics, or mostly dialogue but little singing. Most of these plays were folk or spoken drama had a similar style. For example, the play of *Jiang sanzijing* (*Explaining a Nursery Rhyme*) had six thousand Chinese written characters with only forty characters that constitute the singing lyrics.¹⁴ The proportion of singing lyrics is not even one percent of the dialogue! Some examples are shown in the following table:¹⁵

in Ma Shaobo, Tao Xiong, *Zhongguo jingju fazhan shi* (*A History of Jingju*). Beijing: Zhongguo Xiju Chubanshe, p. 638.

¹⁴ Liu Liemao, Su Huanzhong and Guo Jingrui, eds. *Che Wang Fu quben jinghua* (*The Essence of the Che Wang Fu Repertoire*). 6 vols. Guangzhou: Zhongshan Daxue Chubanshe, vol. 2, 1993, pp 385-393.

¹⁵ The statistics and calculation are based on the manuscripts as collected in the *Che Wang Fu Repertoires*, which was kept in the *Fu Sinian* Library of Taipei and the Library of Zhongshan University, China. The table above are only some examples, and the “marketplace plays” that are to be discussed in the third section of this chapter are mostly of this style.

TABLE 2: EXAMPLES OF *BAIKOU XI*

The title of the plays	The number of lines in the script	The number of lines of songs	Percentage of singing
<i>Bai shui tan</i> (A Shoal of White River)	112	6	5%
<i>Cui feng lou</i> (Jade Phoenix Chamber)	314	24	8%
<i>Mi ren guan</i> (A Charming Mansion)	217	17	8%
<i>Sha pi</i> (A Homicide case)	366	18	5%
<i>Shuan yao hui</i> (A Gamble between Wife and Concubine)	486	9	2%
<i>Long feng pei</i> (A Great Marriage)	548	34	6%

Jade Phoenix Chamber came from *Lü mudan* (*The Green Peony*), a popular novel written during the reign of Daoguang. *A Charming Mansion* came from the novel *Penggong an* (*Penggong Decides Cases*), published in the reign of the Guangsu. The styles of these plays were also similar to folk spoken drama, clearly adopting certain performance techniques from the folk art of *xiangsheng* (cross talk) and *shuoshu* (storytelling).

The Chinese art of cross talk originated in Beijing, and became popular throughout China. Its purpose was to make people laugh, by using “speaking, imitating, provocation and singing” as the main artistic skills. One person, a pair, or a group of people could perform cross-talk. The single person performance usually consists of a story and jokes with one person performing two roles; a pair’s cross-talk begins by one asking a question and the other answering it; and a group performance is

played by more than three people. The early plays of *jingju*, *Shuangling ji* (*The Story of Double Bell*) and *Chou biaocong* (*Bragging about His Deeds*), contain many sections similar to “cross-talk” performed by two or more people.

In contrast, *Explaining a Nursery Rhyme* mixes storytelling skills. It tells the story of Divisional Commander Wen Tao who wanted to appoint a scholar Luo Yin as his staff officer. Wen Tao put on airs and used a *Nursery Rhyme* to test Luo Yin’s literacy. Luo Yin knew that Wen was illiterate. He had made the *Nursery Rhyme* into a story explaining it fearlessly to Wen Tao, who was very satisfied. A unique feature of this play is its story-telling style.

The above plays were created during the early periods of *jingju*. Their style was completely different from that of the traditional *xiqu*, breaking out of the traditions, which was the main characteristic of “*luantan*”. One thing worth mentioning is that these plays were humorous and light-hearted. They completely broke the pattern of classical *xiqu* script writing. They allowed *jingju* performers to focus on the exploration of dialogues, resulting in the change in Chinese theatre from a focus on singing to a focus on both singing and dialogues. They also had an important effect in nurturing *jingju*’s *chou* role¹⁶ (clowns). Some famous *chou* in the early period of *jingju* were Huang Sanxiong (1813-?), Liu Gansan (1817-1894) who were renowned for their performances of *baikou xi*. The plays described above, such as *Yiliang qi*

¹⁶ The *chou* is the clown or comic of the Chinese stage. He is not necessarily a fool and may portray a serious or evil character as against a merely ribald one. See Scott, A. C. *The Classical Theatre of China*, London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1957, p. 76.

(*One Liang of Paint*), *A Gamble between Wife and Concubine*, *Jie Xue (Borrowing Shoes)*, and *Tan qin (Visiting Relatives)* were some of the early works they performed.

The role of *Baikou xi* plays in the formation of the *jingju* performing arts system should never be overlooked. Even after *jingju* matured, there were still a large number of *baikou xi*, which fostered the roles of *sheng* and *dan*.¹⁷ To give some examples, in *baikou xi*, the *laosheng* plays¹⁸ include *Si jinshi (Four Officials)*, *Qingfeng ting (The Qingfeng Pavilion)*, *Shen Pan Hong (Judging Pan Hong)*, *Liubu dashen (A Case Judge by Six Official Departments)*, *Duanbi (Cut off Arm)*, *Shuoshu (Story-telling)* etc. *Wu sheng xi*¹⁹ includes *Wu Wenhua*, *Lianhuan tao (A Chain of Schemes)*, *Luoma hu (The Lake of Luoma)*. *Dan jiao xi* have: *Fanjiang guan (Gate of Fanjiang)*, *Muke zai (The Stockades Village of Muke)*, *Shisan Mei (The Heroine - Shisan Mei)*²⁰. These plays are mostly outstanding works of *jingju*. They all retained the characteristic of focussing on dialogue.

Folk Songs Plays

The performances of this type of plays are mainly based on folk song tunes, and are mostly small-scale. *Xiao fangniu (Tending the Cattle)* had only two characters: a

¹⁷ The *sheng* is always a male character that represents scholar, statesman, warrior patriots, faithful retainer and the like. *Dan* is a role type. The *Dan* actors play female. *Dan jiao xi* is the leading role is female.

¹⁸ *Lao sheng* are aged men of *sheng*.

¹⁹ *Wu sheng* are the part requires stage fighting and acrobatics.

chou and a *dan*. The *chou* character was a young man Zhu Qi. After the death of his parents, Zhu Qi had to tend cattle for a landowner. One spring day, a pretty girl asks Zhu Qi the way and he makes advances to her. They flirt by antiphonal singing until the cattle wander off. The whole piece was mostly folk songs, and the dialogues were only an accompaniment. Another example is *Hua guzi (The Tunes of Drum)*, which depicted a couple that made their living by playing drum tunes. They were often bullied by others, yet they had no choice but to keep their silence. The play used many drum folk tunes.

Again, in the early period of *jingju*, *The Little Widow Visits a Grave* was performed using the *liuzi qiang* tune; *Dang hu chuan (Swing Boat)* was performed using *tanhuang qiang*; and *Damian gang (Hitting a Flour Vat)* was *nanluo qiang*. These tunes were all from regional theatres with clear folk song characteristics, which gave the performance of Anhui troupes folk song characteristics also.

Combat and Acrobat Plays

Kongfu and acrobatics are part of the tradition of Anhui troupes, which created the combat play and acrobatic play. Plays such as *Da lianxiang (A Play of the Whip)* and *Sancha kou (The Three Points to Turn off a Road)* belonged to the fighting and vaudeville performances. *The Three Points to Turn off a Road* was purely intended to exhibit fighting skills. *A Play of the Whip* was originally from an acrobatic show

²⁰ *Shisan Mei (The Heroine - Shisan Mei)* is a large-scale work containing 130,000 Chinese written

in which the actors would use a whip or rod that was made from thinly sliced bamboo or wood, with a string of coins inside the whip. The performer would thrash the whip in all directions, and sometimes at his four limbs, shoulder and back to make lots of clear and melodious sounds, while singing a song or calling out beats.

As indicated by the above descriptions, *jingju* during its infancy was quite different from what it is today. It was a combination of dialogue, folk songs, fighting skills and vaudeville. In many plays, each act had its strong points allowing it to retain the special characteristics of folk arts. The first act of such plays would be a folk song opera; the second act could be a folk spoken drama or a cross talk performed by a group of actors; the third was an acrobatic show; and the fourth a fighting performance. This kind of art was clearly distinguished from *kunqu* and *yi yang-qiang*, which were highly structured and based on *chuanqi* plays. For this reason, it would be more accurate to say that early *jingju* was a program of folk art rather than a type of *xiqu*.

3.3 The Vitality of *Luantan*

The art of *luantan* illustrates the developmental process of *jingju* to its maturity. Although at the beginning, Anhui troupes could perform different types of *xiqu*, and

characters, written in the late-Qing Dynasty.

had many different performing skills, these performing skills had yet to develop into a comprehensive performing art system.

However, the Anhui troupes' *luantan* art had brilliant vitalities. The weak points of Anhui troupes were also its strong points. Different types of *xiqu* such as *kunqu*, *qin qiang*, *jing qiang*, *chui qiang* and *xipi qiang* were performed on the same stage.

Some were based on dialogue; some on folk song; and some on fighting or acrobatics. As the actors of the Anhui troupes performed different types of *xiqu*, they won larger audiences, because audiences from different provinces could enjoy their local arts and different types of *xiqu* on the same stage. The humour of the *baikou xi*, the astounding feats of the combat and acrobat theatre, the vividness of folk song opera were very suitable for the popular stage and were welcomed by the audiences. This is one of the reasons why the Anhui troupes were able to flourish in Beijing.

Since they were able to perform different types of *xiqu*, they avoided many political risks. In 1798, the Qing government issued a proscriptive edict to ban the newly rising *luantan*. The prohibition asserted that *luantan*, *bangzi qiang*, *xiansuo qiang* (string instruments), *qin qiang* and other types of *xiqu* had a destructive impact on the customs and people's morals, and therefore they should be strictly prohibited.²¹ Faced with such prohibitions, the Anhui troupes were able to perform *kunqu* plays instead of *luantan qiang*. Therefore, while other troupes split up or were never able

²¹ See *Suzhou laolangmiao beiji* (*The Inscription on a Table of Laolang Temple in Suzhou*).

to recover after the prohibition, the Anhui troupes survived and flourished in the competition.

From the history of the Anhui troupes, it is easy to understand why *jingju* combined a variety of forms of performing skills and play writing, which were completely different from traditional *xiqu*. Since the troupes had many advantages in various areas of performing skills, their ability to form a new performing arts system and create new forms of plays were only a matter of time. During 1840-1860, this new performing arts system gradually developed into a richer and more varied system than other types of *xiqu*. The Anhui troupes had available to them many different types of tunes to portray different characters and their psychological changes. A great diversity of performing skills was also advantageous in expressing the greater range and depths of the new scripts.

The famous actor and playwright of the Daoguang period, Shen Xiaoqing (1805-1855), was an important figure in the formation of *jingju*. Shen Xiaoqing wrote numerous plays, mostly military plays that focus on dialogues. His representative works include *Ba dana* (*The Capture of Eight Major Outlaws*), *E-hu chun* (*The Village of Fierce Tiger*). These plays, with their well-knitted plots or their excellent stage designs, were all well received by the audience. He was the first playwright and director who blended the Anhui troupes' traditional acrobatics with the plots and made *kungfu* performance an integrated part of the plot, and in doing so, contributed greatly to the formation of *jingju*'s performing arts system.

In addition, there were a large number of actors in the Anhui companies who actually came from *kunqu*'s hometown Jiangsu Province. These performers also made contributions to the formation of *jingju*, particular by enhancing *jingju*'s singing techniques. The following is a table of the native origins of Beijing actors during the reigns of Qianlong to Xianfeng (1785-1859):

TABLE 3: BACKGROUND OF PERFORMING ACTORS IN BEIJING FROM 1780-1850

The name of works	Author or (Pen name)	Year of publishing	Jiangsu	Hubei	Anhui	Zhejiang	Shaanxi	Shanxi	Beijing	Jiangxi	Sichuan
Yanlan xiaopu	Wu Changyuan	1785	21	1		3	2	2		1	11
Re xia kan hua ji	Xiao tie di dao ren	1803	39		25	1	1		2		3
Pian yu ji	Qing ge zhu ren	1805	19		2		1				
Ting chun xin yong	Liu chun ge xiao shi	1810	39	2	14		2	1	7		2
Ying hua xiao pu	Ban biao zi	1819	9		1	1		1			
Yan tai ji yan	Bo hua zhu ren	1823	11		10						
Jing tai chan lei ji	Hua xu da fu	1828	11		8				1		
Xin ren gui jia lu	Yang Maojian	1834	3		4						
Chang an kan hua ji	Yang Maojian	1837	8		1						
Ding nian yu sun zhi	Yang Maojian	1842	5		1						
Tan bo	Bu tou tuo	1852	8		1						
Fa ying mi ji	Shuang ying an zhu	1842	43		8						
Yan tai hua shi	Shen qiao yi ke, Dou shuai gong shi zhe, Ji zhai ji sheng	1859	7								
Total			223	3	75	5	6	4	10	1	16

As the table shows, Jiangsu actors predominated. Not all the Jiangsu actors belonged to the Anhui companies, but the Anhui troupes had many Jiangsu actors

and performed many *kunqu* plays. *Kunqu* actors brought *kunqu*'s vitality into the Anhui troupes, which retained the traditional *xiqu*'s singing method in *jingju*.

In the early Qing Dynasty, though *Anhui xi* was prominent, the prestige of its art was lower than *kunqu*. The Anhui troupes would not have been able to hold a dominant position in Yangzhou or Beijing if they had only depended on *Anhui xi*. Because the Anhui troupes had yet not formed an integrated and established system, it was easy for them to adopt and incorporate the strong points of other types of *xiqu*. Through the process of *luantan*, *jingju* became a crystallization of multi-*xiqu* culture, and was suited both to refined and popular tastes. No other type of *xiqu* combined so many tunes and performing skills together, even the language of *jingju* included different dialects, so that it was more readily accepted by audiences from different regions.

3.4 Plays about Social Conventions and Marketplaces

A component of the early *jingju*'s *luantan* art is the *luantan* plays. In particular, the most distinctive feature of the *luantan* plays is the "marketplace play". The marketplace play was created during a special historical period, a period when the control of ideology by Emperor Qinglong and Emperor Jiaqing caused theatre to gradually ossify. Marketplace plays had a style that was distinctively different from the traditional style. It was not as elegant as the traditional *xiqu* and it employed pure colloquial language. Its plays did not involve high culture subjects but depicted

ordinary events occurring around the common people. It completely shattered the standard format for play writing, which pointed to its “*luantan*” feature.

3.4.1 Historical Background of the Middle Qing

In the Qing dynasty, Emperor Qianlong was a capable emperor. One of his major tasks was to rearrange ancient books on a grand scale. *Siku quanshu* (*The Encyclopaedia of Classics, Histories, Philosophers and Belles-lettres*) was the largest of these projects. It consisted of three thousand five hundred and three books, in total seventy-nine thousand three hundred and thirty-seven volumes, which were bound into three thousand six hundred volumes. The book included the writings of the Han scholars, as well as minority nationality scholars and some Asian and some European scholars. It included the “four parts” of Confucian classics, history, famous scholars’ academic works and collections of poems and prose, based on the effort of three thousand eight hundred people who took seventeen years and huge financial resources to complete it. This could not have been accomplished except in the flourishing age of the Qing Dynasty. The dictionary *Siku quanshu zongmu* (*A Title Catalogue and Summary for The Encyclopaedia of Classics, Histories, Philosophers and Belles- Lettres*) was completed in 1781 based on *The Encyclopaedia of Classics, Histories, Philosophers and Belles-lettres*. “ This large catalogue book could only

have been compiled in a mature civilization with a learned reappraisal of its ancient traditions.”²²

However, the other side of this maturity of the classical culture was a series of ideological restrictions by Emperor Qianlong. From the thirty-seventh to fifty-fifth years of the Qianlong period, he handed down twenty-five “imperial edicts” on the compilation of *The Encyclopaedia of Classics, Histories, Philosophers and Belles-lettres*. These imperial edicts contained detailed instructions on the principles of collection, rules for analyzing historical events and historical figure and even for the revision of original classical works. “Those who depart from the classics and rebel against orthodoxy and confound right and wrong should be criticised severely.”²³ Any works that violated the teaching of Confucianism should be severely repudiated or burned, according to the circumstances.

When these ideological restrictions were implemented in the theatrical world, they represented Emperor Qianlong’s strict control over theatrical content. According to Li Dou’s *A Record of Pleasure Boat in Yangzhou*, the Minister of Salt Affairs, Yi Alin established an office in Yangzhou to examine and revise the traditional *xiqu* on the order of Emperor Qianlong. This job was completed in four years with one thousand and thirteen pieces of traditional plays examined and revised.²⁴ The

²² Feng Tianyu, He Xiaoming and Zhou Jiming. *Zhongguo wenhuashi (The History of Chinese Culture)*. Shanghai: Shanghai Renming Chubanshe, 1990, p.861.

²³ Ibid. p.902.

²⁴ Li Dou. *Yangzhou huafang lu (A Record of Pleasure Boat in Yangzhou)*. Yangzhou: Jiangsu Guanglin Guji Keyinshe, 1984, pp.103, 115.

government officials strived to construct the plays within the teachings of Confucianism and to eliminate all rebellious ideas.

Ideological restrictions inevitably brought about the ossification of the *xiqu* and its move from plays depicting realistic topics. There were almost no outstanding plays written during the Qianlong period. The traditional *chuanqi* plays written by officials and *literati* mostly aimed to express an admiration for the classical realm of the peaceful life, and elegance of style. They were romantic but not intimate, very poetic yet lacking passion. “The artistic values may increase by the days, but their distance from common people also increased.”²⁵ Although these plays may have exquisite lyrics, they lacked dramatic plots for the audience.²⁶ Therefore, these plays can only be read but not to be performed.

The gradual ossification of theatre during the Qianlong period was also due to the internal development of *xiqu*. From the time that *xiqu* reached its first climax in the Yuan Dynasty, up until mid-Qing, it experienced the rise and decline of many different theatrical forms. There were milestone works that dealt with reality and the future, there were plays that purely served as a preaching tool of orthodox morals, and there were also “model plays” such as *Pipa ji* (*The Pipa Song*) recommended by the founding Emperor of the Ming Dynasty - Emperor Zhu Yuanzhang. Even though the contents of these plays were different, they all from various perspectives

²⁵ Meng Yao. *Zhongguo xiju shi* (*A History of the Chinese Theatre*), 4 vols. Taipei: Chuanji Wenxue Chubanshe, 1969, p 397.

demonstrated the “seriousness” and “prestige” of writing plays. This kind of “seriousness” and “prestige” produced “model” plays, which in turn became obstacles for to creativity. For example, *The Pipa Song* was the work of Gao Zecheng of the later Yuan. The story began when Cai Bojie was on his way to the Capital for the imperial examinations, while his wife Zhao Wuniang stayed at home with the daily family chores. Cai Bojie came first in the imperial examination and later married the daughter of Prime Minister Niu. When Cai Bojie’s hometown suffered severe famine, both of his parents died of hunger, and his wife Zhao Wuniang begged her way to the Capital. Finally, with the help of Prime Minister Niu’s daughter, who agreed to lower herself to the status of Cai’s concubine, Zhao Wuniang was reunited with her husband. The whole play aimed to highlight the loyalty and filial piety of Cai Bojie, and to demonstrate the ultimate friendly relationship between the wife Zhao Wuniang and concubine Niu. When Emperor Zhu Yuanzhang of the Ming Dynasty first saw this play, he was highly appreciative, and thought every official and *literati* family must possess a copy.²⁷

The circulation of *The Pipa Song* had a huge influence and subsequently inspired playwrights to focus solely on the relationship between scholars and their wives and concubines. Wan Shu was a Qing playwright who specialized in writing this sort of plays. His representative works are *Fengliu bang* (*A Talented and Romantic*

²⁶ Wu Mei. *Zhongguo xiqu gailun* (*An Outline of Chinese Xiqu*). Hong Kong: Taiping Shuju, 1964, (photorep), p. 39.

²⁷ Xu Wei. *Nanci xulu* (*Narrate South Xiqu*). In ZGXLJ, vol 3, p.240

Scholar), *Kong qingshi* (*A Green Crystal*), for instance, had a bizarre plot and abnormal love relationship, but aimed at sanctimonious preaching.

In 1779, Wei Changsheng (1744-1802), a *qin qiang* performer, arrived in Beijing and brought a breath of fresh air to the theatre. Wei was born into a poor family in Jintang county of Sichuang Province. At the age of 13, Wei began learning the art of theatre in Xi'an by playing leading female roles, and went to Beijing after several years of studies. By performing *Gun lou* (*Falling from a Tower*), Wei's name "quickly spread throughout Beijing, and his audience exceeded a thousand each day."²⁸ He became the focus figure of theatrical activities in Beijing. Because the *Falling from a Tower* was later banned, the content of *Falling from a Tower* is not known to many. This play tells the story of the love between Huang Saihua and Wu Xin, the son of Wu Zixu, a historical figure of the Spring-Autumn period in the Zhou Dynasty. The plot is fictitious. Wu Xin, a young general, killed Huang Saihua's father and elder brother in a battle, but he was defeated by Huang and escaped to Lanjia Village. The head of the village, the revered Mr Lan, recognised Wu Xin as a young man of great aspirations and heroic conduct and so he betrothed his daughter Lan Xiuying to him. On the wedding night, Wu Xin told Lan Xiuying about his love for Huang Saihua. Surprisingly, Lan Xiuying and Huang Saihua were good friends, and they often practised martial arts and rode horses together. Lan Saihua thought of a clever plan for her husband. She pretended to be sick and invited Huang Saihua to

²⁸ Wu Changyuan, *Yanlan xiaopu* (*Information about Performers*). 1785. In QYLS, vol 5, p.4.

visit her, and made Huang Saihua turned her hatred of Wu Xin into love and they were united in a happy marriage.

Falling from the Tower as performed by Wei Changsheng belonged to the category of plays that endorsed the idea of “embracing a wife and a concubine”. However, this play represented a breakthrough in its new theme of “to turn enemies into friends”. Further, its expression of feelings was straightforward, not feigned in order to conceal the characters’ true feelings. Unlike *The Pipa Song* and other *chuanqi* plays, *Falling from the Tower* did not describe the relationship between wives and concubines while trying to preach the Confucianism moral precepts.

Wei Changsheng’s expressions of feelings were straightforward and his performances predominantly emphasised sex, according to Qing scholars Wu Taichu²⁹ and Zhang Hengpu³⁰. Wei Changsheng and *qinqiang* were therefore considered offensive to decency. *Qinqiang* were banned,³¹ and Wei Changsheng was forced to leave Beijing in 1885.

In the history of *xiqu*, Wei Changsheng was an innovator, and his performing skills were not “lascivious in order to attract audiences”. A Qing scholar Zhang Hengfu stated that when he first watched Wei Changsheng’s performance in *Falling from the Tower*, he did not like it. Later, when he saw his *Tie Lianhua* (*The Steel Lotus*), he

²⁹ Ibid. vol 3, p.9.

³⁰ Zhang Jiliang . *Jintai canlei ji* (*The Bitter Stories of the Theatre*). 1828. In QYLS, vol 6. p.5.

began to admire him. After several years, he again had the opportunity to watch Wei Shangsheng's performance, and noticed that his skills had improved. The higher his aspirations were, the harder he worked. He had strict self-discipline.³² Another Qing scholar Zhao Yi also stated, "Wei do not solely base his plays on traditional plays, and he is willingly to perform plays of new themes and innovations."³³ Wei Changsheng portrayed many different kinds of female characters, such as Guiwa in *Song yindeng* (*Delivering a Silver Lantern*), Wang Guiying in *Mai yanzhi* (*Selling Rouge*) and so on. These plays were not traditional plays, and Wei Changsheng was able to add vivid personalities to these characters. As an innovator, Wei Changsheng's unwilling departure from Beijing was directly linked to his performances. "The *qinqiang* actors were much less tied to standard scripts than their counterparts in the *jing qiang* and *kunqu*, the texts of which had become stereotyped by decades of close supervision in Peking."³⁴

Soon after *qinqiang* was banned, Anhui troupes entered Beijing. Their marketplace plays were produced at the time when theatre had ossified and the government was keeping a sharp eye on the stage.

³¹ Kun Gang. *Da Qing huidian shili* (*A Collection of Events in the Qing Dynasty*). Taipei: (photorep. Of 1899 edition), 1963, p.1039, 15b-16a.

³² From Meng Yao, *Zhongguo xiqushi* (*A History of the Chinese Theatre*). Taipei: Chuanji Wenxue Chubanshe, 1969, p.431.

³³ Zhao Yi, *Yanbao zaji* (*Miscellany of Yanbao*). In *Biji xiaoshuo daguan* (*An Overview of Literary Sketches*), no.33. Taipei: Xinxing Shudian Youxian Gongs, 1987, p.38.

³⁴ Mackerras, Colin P. *The Rise of the Peking Opera*. London: Oxford University Press, 1972, p. 94.

3.4.2 The Marketplace Plays of the Anhui Troupes

The marketplace plays portrayed a commercial city bustling with activities, and reflected the lives of city dwellers and their environment. In this urban society, there were various kinds of people: the simple city dwellers, generous people who love to do philanthropic work, the kind hearted boss of small business, poor teachers, handicraftsman, even drunkards and gamblers. *Qie Sugong (A Private Complaint)* describes the story of Bai Erge who opened a teahouse in Beijing. A villain spoke ill of him behind his back and his business slumped. This made Bai Erge very angry and full of hatred. *Chou biao gong (Bragging about his Deeds)* depicts an employee named Zhang Duqi who wanted to quit his job due to his dissatisfaction with his boss. When calculating his wage, minus all expenses and fees, he was left with only two hundred coins. He was furious and left without taking his money. In the end, the money fell into the hands of his guarantor. These plays reflected the daily lives and work of the commercialized city dwellers. They also showed the different kinds of complex new relationships surrounding these figures.

Amongst the marketplace plays, we can see many plays that involved family ethics and family disputes, especially disputes between husband and wife due to poverty as in *Shao guo (Burning the Pot)*. *Gongping pan (A Fair judgement)* and *Fen jia (Divide up the Family Property)* showed how brothers and sisters-in-law divide family property and live separately due to fierce family disputes. *Tuimo ji (The Story*

of *Pushing Mill*) portrayed the conflicts between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, and the disputes between families by marriage.

Visiting Relatives tells the story of an old woman, Hu, who lived in the country. Her daughter Yehua was betrothed to the Li family living in the city. Mother Hu came to the city to visit her daughter. The parents of the two families began conversing, but due their differences of opinion on Yehua, the conversation turned into an argument and ended in a fight. This kind of plays demonstrated a sentiment completely different from that in the traditional plays. To watch this kind of theatre was similar to listen to different family disputes and to participate in solving these disputes.

Visiting Relatives was a play performed by Liu Gansan in his early years. Liu Gansan's reputation increased rapidly due to his role as Mother Hu in *Visiting Relatives*. According to records, when Liu was performing this play, he rode a trained donkey onto stage. Even though the theatre was very noisy, the donkey was not afraid.³⁵ Riding a real donkey onto stage was very “*luantan*”, but it also illustrated the early *jingju* performers' courage in exploring new possibilities for artistic performance. Such exploration was in fact, an attempt to make the play more realistic in portraying daily lives.

Most of the marketplace plays were comedy. They fall into two categories of content. One category is *xiao ju* (laughing theatre or farce), which was Chinese

³⁵ Zhou Mingtai. *Daoxian yilia liyuan xinian xiaolu* (Theatrical Information from the Reigns of Daoguan and Xianfeng onwards). Shanghai: 1932, p.2. In *Jiliju xiqu congshu* (The Series of Xiqu from Jiliju), Category no. 3.

comedy. The second category was similar to Western comedies. The main characters in these two categories were mostly ordinary people with different weaknesses or bad habits as in real life. They were neither perfect heroes nor out and out villains. In laughing theatre, playwrights fully explored the weaknesses of these characters but affirmed their personalities. In order to praise their inner beauty, playwrights always sneered at their weak points first. In comedies, while the playwrights mocked the characters' shortcomings, they also criticise their bad habits and criticised the negative aspects of society.

Laughing Theatre

Laughing theatre depicts the lower stratum of society as a warm and loving world. *One Liang of Paint* described the story of a scholar named Yuan Qing who came to Beijing to visit his relatives. Due to his appearance, the doorkeeper blocked him from entering the doors of his relatives' house. Thereupon, Yuan Qing fainted outside the doors with anger. When a painter named Pu Huzi saw this, he sympathized with Yuan and kindly asked him to stay. When they arrived at Pu's house, Pu Huzi's daughter fell in love with scholar Yuan Qing at first sight. Pu Huzi intended to betroth his daughter to him, so he asked Bao as their matchmaker, and invited Gou Yingyang, A fortune-teller, to pick a lucky day for the marriage.

One Liang of Paint is a play replete with humour. Both matchmaker Bao and Gou Yingyang are snobs. When Pu Huzi invited them, they were worried that he would not have the money to pay them. Therefore, matchmaker Bao said that she was required to help deliver a child and could not go, while Gou Yingyang declined by saying that he had to conduct a funeral. However, when they heard that Pu Huzi would pay them 1.7 *liang*³⁶ of silver, they changed their attitudes immediately: “I will ask them to have the baby tomorrow.”³⁷ “I will change the date for the funeral.”³⁸ They cheerfully came to Pu Huzi’s house. Afterwards, when they asked Pu Huzi for their commission, they were given “one *liang* of paint.”³⁹ They were dumbfounded, and realized that Pu Huzi had tricked them both. In the play, Pu Huzi was often bullied and ridiculed by others due to his poverty. Consequently, he also learnt how to make fun of others. Using a literary style that was humorous yet with good intention, the playwright thoroughly ridiculed the weaknesses of these nobodies. Thus the whole play was filled with a comical atmosphere.

This comical atmosphere was accomplished by using contrasts. The contrast of the behaviour of the matchmakers Bao and Gou Yingyang before and after the betrothal ceremony had unpredictable comical effect. These two uncouth characters spoke of money all the time, but when they started working, the thought of money hardly crossed their minds. When matchmaker Bao had completed her work, she was not

³⁶ A unit of weight. One *liang* equals fifty grams.

³⁷ Liu Liemao and Guo Jingrui, eds. *Che Wang Fu quben xuan (Selected Works from the Che Wang Fu Repertoire)*. Guangzhou: Zhongshan Daxue Chubanshe, 1990, p. 51

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

eager to claim her money as reward. We were surprised that this snobbish figure would, at the key moments, be able to sincerely suggest good ideas, and make the wedding as perfect as she could. We are also shocked that Gou Yingyang, a poor widower, would willingly lend his best garments to Yuan Qing without any recompense. Therefore, we begin to treat them with increased respect.

Pu Huzi was the main character of the play. Although he liked to make fun of others, he did not make fun of people all the time. When he saw Yuan Qing lying on the ground, it is his basic instinct that urged him to inquire, and then invite Yuan Qing to go to his house and have a rest. Yuan Qing asked, "We have never met, how can I make trouble for you?" Pu Huzi replied, "There is nothing friends wouldn't do for each other."⁴⁰ When Pu Huzi helped this poor scholar, he did not expect recompense. All he wanted to do was to lend a hand to someone in need. In order to portray his personality more comprehensively, the playwright deliberately created another character to compare with him. This character was the relative of Yuan Qing, Master Chu. Master Chu was an upper-class government official while Pu Huzi was a lowly house painter. The first came from a family of justice and virtue, but he used his fiendish gatekeeper to keep his relative, Yuan Qing from entering his premises. While Pu Huzi poor, he was willing to help others, even a stranger. It was this kind of contrast that injected an element of irony into the play.

³⁹ Seven and paint are both pronounced as "qi" in Chinese. Therefore, "yiliang qi" in here has two meanings. One is "1.7 liang of silver", and the other means "one liang of paint". The playwright makes use of pun as a source of mockery.

⁴⁰ Liu Liemao and Guo Jingrui, eds. *Che Wang Fu quben xuan (Selected Works from the Che Wang Fu Repertoire)*. Guangzhou: Zhongshan Daxue Chubanshe, 1990, p. 47.

Zhuang feng (Feigned Madness) was an example of plays, which portrayed the inner beauty of ordinary people. A beggar named Liu Piao-er had finally become the head of a group of beggars. One day, he met a child abducted from Dingxing County. Liu Piao-er, who was often mentally deranged and thus gained a reputation for irrationality, did not act like a lunatic at that moment. Instead, he sympathized with the child's misfortune and asked one of his followers, Liu San-er to send the child to his home where he gave the child a string of coins. This play, by turning a madman into a man of good mental health, revealed the inner beauty of an outwardly ugly character

Obviously the special feature of laughing theatre is laughs, and a play that cannot make people laugh is not a laughing theatre. "True laughter comes suddenly, one does not have to think about it."⁴¹ This is often represented by laughing loudly, but there is also the understanding smile. This kind of smile comes from the surprise discovery of new knowledge, new objects, which makes the audience happy.⁴² *One Liang of Paint* and *Feigned Madness* contain both types of humour. The humorous colloquial language used in these plays would immediately make the audience laugh. Further, the playwrights first drew the audience's attention to the characters' personal weakness and shortcomings. It would be hard, at first, to imagine that these characters would do any good deeds. Yet surprisingly, these characters did.

⁴¹ Zhu Guangqian. *Zhu Guangqian meixue wenji diyi juan (A Collection of Aesthetics Works by Zhu Guangqian - Volume one)*. Shanghai: Shanghai Wenyi Chubanshe, 1982, p. 278.

Therefore, people began to smile understandingly when time they discovered the strength of these characters.

Comedy

Borrowing Shoes belongs to the category of comedy. The play describes Zhang Dan who came to his friend Liu Ergong to borrow a pair of shoes in order to go to a dinner party. However, in order to lend Zhang his shoes, Liu Ergong required Zhang to worship the god of shoes. He then told Zhang that this pair of shoes was hard earned, so he must take very good care of them. Further, Liu Ergong asked Zhang to promise him to only wear the shoes during the banquet and not on the road. Finally, after a huge sacrificial ceremony, Zhang Dan quickly rushed out to attend the banquet, but the banquet was already over. Crestfallen, Zhang left. On the way home, he was very hungry and tired and fell asleep on the road. Meanwhile, Liu Ergong stayed at home waiting for Zhang Dan to return his shoes. At midnight, Zhang Dan still had not returned, so he decided to go and find him. Carrying a lantern, Liu saw Zhang sleeping on the ground using his shoes as a pillow. Liu Ergong was furious. He grabbed the shoes busily beating away the dust and checking for any damage.

Borrowing Shoes used satirical literary humours to expose the abnormal personalities of two characters and criticise their weaknesses. Zhang Dan was a rascal, who

⁴² Lu Yifan. *Wenyi xinlixue (The Psychology of Literature and Art)*. Nanjing: Jiangsu Wenyi

always wanted to gain advantage by unfair means, thought himself the cleverest man in the world, while his friend Liu Ergong who was stingy by nature, thought himself the kindest man in the world to his friends. Comical people often do not see their own weaknesses, which can be recognised by everyone except themselves.

Therefore, Zhang Dan who thought he was smart, and Liu Ergong who was proud of his “kindness” to friends, became figures of mockery. The playwright teased Zhang Dan by making him miss the banquet after he borrowed the shoes, and subsequently faint on the side of road due to hunger. Similarly, the playwright kidded Liu Ergong by making his shoes a burden and worry for him. Liu Ergong never had the opportunity to enjoy wearing this pair of shoes, but he was on tenterhooks that Zhang Dan might damage the shoes. All the hardships Liu Ergong endured as he was looking for his shoes far exceeded their value.

Zhang Dan and Liu Ergong were two repellent characters. Facing such repellent figures, how can the audience laugh? This is a different laugh from the laughing theatre. We are unhappy with the amusing behaviors of clowns. However, what we are happy about is that we can see through the plots, and understand that ugly is ugly. Since we can laugh at the ugly, we have already surpassed them. This is the value of *Borrowing Shoes*.

The rise of marketplace plays aided the prosperity of comedy plays. These developed from making fun of marketplace nobodies to satirizing the upper-class

Chubanshe, 1987, p.169.

officials. The story of *Da miangang (Hitting the Flour Vat)* was an example. The play began when an official prostitute named Lamei pleaded to the county Magistrate Zhao that she no longer wished to be an official prostitute. The Magistrate Zhao betrothed her to a bailiff called Zhang Cai, and used this case as a proof of his incorruptibility and his ability to change the hearts even of prostitutes. However, on the day of the marriage, Magistrate Zhao sent Zhang Cai away to deliver an official document. At night, Clerk Wang came to Zhang Cai's house to talk with Lamei about his "past friendship". Lamei told him that unlike the old days, she could no longer treat him the same as before. Suddenly, someone arrived at the door, and Clerk Wang quickly hid inside the stove. Lamei opened her door; it was the Magistrate Assistant. He came tonight to substitute for Zhang Cai. During their conversation, Magistrate Zhao also came to call upon Lamei. Promptly, the Magistrate Assistant hid inside the flour container. Just as the Magistrate began to flirt with Lamei, Zhang Cai came knocking on the door. All of a sudden, the Magistrate quickly concealed himself under the bed. Zhang Cai came in carrying wine and food. He abused the Magistrate loudly angry at having been ordered to deliver documents on his wedding day. As he tried to light up the stove to warm his wine, Clerk Wang came out in a sorry plight. When he wanted to get some flour, the Magistrate Assistant emerged from the flour container. Both of them were Zhang's immediate superiors. Zhang asked them to judge the right and wrong of this event. The Magistrate Assistant was so embarrassed to reply that he invited the Magistrate Zhao, to come out from under the bed to clarify the whole affair. They were all fined by Zhang Cai with the order to conceal tonight's event, and then

quickly, they escaped. The Magistrate was forced to take off his official gowns and shoes, and then was thrown out of the house.

Hitting the Flour Vat was an outstanding comedy play, firstly for the playwright's arrangement of timing, location and event. During the Renaissance, Italian scholars suggested a creative principle of "one event, one whole day, and one location" based on Aristotle's opinion on the plots of Greek tragedy. Most playwrights of Classicism strictly followed this principle. Similarly, the *jingju* play *Hitting the Flour Vat* also describe one event, in one whole day, and based on one location, the kitchen of Zhang Cai's house. However, the difference is that *Hitting the Flour Vat* is a comedy not a tragedy.

The play uses strong contrasts to express bitter ironies. Although Lamei was a prostitute, her self-respect prevented her from accepting any of the demands of the Magistrate Assistant and others who came to her door on the day of her marriage. In the play, although Magistrate Zhao, the Magistrate Assistant and Clerk Wang always spoke volubly of justice and virtue, they could not control their evil desires. This gave the play a solemn theme in the midst of a comical atmosphere. The detailed arrangements of events also displayed the playwright's ingenuity. Clerk Wang hid inside the stove, the Magistrate Assistant concealed his appearance inside a flour vat. Therefore, when they both awkwardly appeared, the first was fully coated in black dusts, while the latter was covered in white flour. This striking black

and white contrast intensified the comical atmosphere while highlighting the ironies.

From mocking the nobodies' weakness to exposing evil social practices and satirizing the upper class, these plays embodied the maturity of comedy creations. *Guang ju (A Cantonese Scholar)* describes a Cantonese scholar who went to the Capital for the imperial examination. Half way, he met a Confucian moralist and they both stayed in the same hotel. They were enticed by several prostitutes. Discussing the Confucian moral that scholars should not sleep with prostitutes, they thought highly of themselves as scholars. However, they still gave in to their "human desires" in the end, and slept with these prostitutes. Consequently, when they woke up the next morning, they discovered that all their clothes and money were stolen. *Cantonese scholar* exposes the ugly deeds of the *lixue* moralist.⁴³ This play was performed by the Chuntai troupe of Anhui Company and was very influential at that time.⁴⁴

3.5 Conclusion

Jingju, during the *luantan* period, has presented a unique path of artistic development. It was characterized by the performance of different types of *xiqu* on the same stage. For example, *Baikou xi*, acrobatics, opera in folk song, all these

⁴³ *Lixue*, see the next chapter.

⁴⁴ Li Dou. *Yangzhou huafang lu (Record of Pleasure Boats in Yangzhou)*. Yangzhou: Jiangsu Guanglin Guji Keyinshe, 1984, p. 127.

different genres of *xiqu* have enabled the Anhui troupes to present a “*luantan*” (chaotic) but lively element to the theatre. This was one of the reasons for the Anhui troupes’ continued survival amongst the fierce theatrical competition in Beijing.

However, it also showed that the artistic level of performances during the Anhui troupes period did not yet constitute an integrated *xiqu* type. This is the reason why *jingju* is referred to as *luantan* for longer than other types of *xiqu*.

Jingju’s *luantan* art was in fact, a “modern” art during a special era. It portrayed dissatisfaction towards traditions and was a brave pursuit for a new art form. The Anhui troupes did not continue performing traditional *Anhui xi*. They were also dissatisfied with the classical performing arts. Just as any newly arising modern art, they had to experience a process of public acceptance. Once *jingju* was able to form a new performing arts system based on multi-theatrical genres and multi-theatre forms, it became more inclusive than other types of *xiqu*, and hence replaced *kunqu*’s traditional prestigious position. Therefore, without the so-called *luantan* art, no new art form would have developed and thus no *jingju*. If the *luantan* theatre had not emerged, there would not been a surge of popular *xiqu* in the history of Chinese *xiqu*.

As a newly emerged type of “*luantan*” theatre, the early *jingju* demonstrated a brave endeavor in the performing arts. Among them, *baikou xi* is the new creation. Most of the early marketplace plays belongs to this category. The large number of this type of

plays reflected the scale of its popularity, and thus broke the classical tradition of “singing is the master, and speaking is the guest”. Although *jingju* did not develop into spoken drama, *baikou xi* was always a special category of *jingju* loved by audiences in the history of *jingju*.

Another achievement of the early *jingju* is the expansion of the style of Chinese comedy, and the widening of the scope of theatrical themes. Although comedy and tragedy were not central to the concepts of the Chinese playwrights and theorists, early *jingju* playwrights had remarkable achievements in writing comedies. This kind of achievement was first to be seen in the marketplace plays.

The rise of the marketplace plays, laughing plays and comedy plays are no coincidence. The audience of early *jingju* was mostly the common people of Beijing. Thus, the playwrights’ responsibilities were to exhibit urban lifestyle and the man in the street. This provided favourable conditions for the creation of comedy.

The classical *xiqu* also had plays that presented the lower classes. However, for a lower class person to become the main character of a play, they had to represent traditional morals. The *jingju*’s marketplace play presents a completely different kind of nonentities to the traditional: the urban common man with weaknesses and shortcomings. Playwrights use humour, exaggeration, sarcasm and other techniques to recreate the behaviour these characters, and criticise their shortcomings. This is

why comical plays prospered, and based on this foundation, outstanding works that revealed social evils and satirised ugly acts of the upper class were created.

Jingju's marketplace plays brought a breath of fresh air to the theatre. During the time of strict ideological control and the consequent gradual ossification of theatre, the literati and officials began to search for more "leisure" subjects from ancient books in order to avoid political risks. At the same time, marketplace plays represented a return to realism with their depiction of ordinary events in the lives of the common people.

Marketplace plays rid themselves of the burdens placed on traditional theatre. Theatre no longer presented a false picture of peace and prosperity, nor had the mission of preaching. It used ordinary subjects, which allowed audience to see themselves on the stage.

Marketplace plays were created at the time when *jingju* was still in its formation stage, displaying a bold exploratory and creative spirit thus contributing to the early *jingju* laughing plays and comedy fever. In the love story plays of the following chapter, we will see that most of these works also contain comical scenes.

Chapter Four

Moral Conflicts Reflected in the Love Story Play

4.0 Introduction

Closely related to the marketplace play is the love story play with a female in a leading role. In *Yuan zaju* and *chuanqi*, the love story play already has formed an outstanding tradition of rebellion against classical morals and of promoting self-determined marriage. However, compare to *Yuan zaju* and *chuanqi*, the achievements of *jingju*'s love story play are remarkable. The *jingju* love story play is the focus of the present chapter.

The plays to be analyzed in this chapter include plays dating from the mid-Qing Dynasty to the late-Qing Dynasty. This chapter consists of three parts. 1. The Conflict between Love and Confucianism; 2. The Conflict between Love and Religion; and 3. Liu San's Love Story Play.

My analyses will show that these plays developed significantly in philosophical and moral complexity of theme and social context, particularly, in relation to love. While earlier plays dealt with the conflict between love and social morality or Confucian law, *jingju* reflected the new currents in thought, questioning the old religious and traditional values, and developed this theme in new directions.

Love stories were the subject of many *jingju* and were considered to be the most exciting themes. However, unlike European theatre and opera, *jingju* never focused on love itself as an exalted state of being, or imbued love with the spiritual dimensions of courtly love in medieval Europe. Chinese love stories always concerned themselves with the social context of love and the conflict between love and the moral codes.

In the mid-Qing Dynasty the emperor tightened his ideological control over the people, and love story plays were often criticized by the intellectual establishment of the day. From the middle to the later Qing dynasty (1736-1850), one official prohibition after another was directed at these love stories, which were labelled *you sang feng hua* (an offence against decency). Analysing the scripts of these love stories, therefore, not only helps us to understand the characteristics of love stories in the *jingju* of this period, but the different trends of thought in the Qing Dynasty.

The new directions and developments in *jingju*, particularly in love stories of the Qing Dynasty, can be broadly described in terms of three major themes. First of all, love was set in more detailed historical contexts with more complex characterization, particularly of women, who were presented as strong, decisive, passionate and talented. Secondly, love plays consciously adopted a strongly anti-religious and anti-traditional cultural stance. Thirdly, plays about courtesans' love affairs reflected the spirit of the times. Liu San's plays were the first to advocate the equality of the sexes and consider prostitutes as normal human beings. Qing Dynasty *jingju* then, was

remarkable in its creative development in new directions and in contextual, characterization and gender issues.

4.1 The Conflict between Love and Confucianism (*lixue*)

In the Qing Dynasty, the emperors endorsed the *lixue* School of Confucianism (Song Ming Confucianism) as the dominant ideology. The *lixue* School's assertion that human desire should be eliminated exerted a strong influence on *xiqu* circles.

Officials used the *lixue* moral code to censor traditional Chinese scripts. Model *lixue* Confucian heroes were set on the stage as examples of this moral code, and a number of scripts called "against obscenity and robbery" were created to promote this code.

At the same time, although *lixue* became an officially sponsored doctrine, it encountered opposition in academic and artistic circles.¹ Both of these conflicting sentiments of the acceptance and opposition of *lixue* were reflected in the theatrical field.

4.1.1 *Lixue* and Zhu Xi

One of the most important masters of *lixue* in the Song Dynasty was Zhu Xi. It was during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) that the founding emperor Zhu Yuanzhang raised *lixue* to a very lofty position. He repeatedly emphasized: "You should learn

¹ As an important Confucian school, the influence of *lixue* (Song Ming Confucianism) in the history of Chinese ideology can hardly be overstated; this chapter does not deal with the influence of *lixue* comprehensively. It only shows the conflict between love and *lixue* from the point of view of literature and *xiqu*.

from Zhu Xi's books. Let scholars know that no books should be read except those by Confucius and Mencius, and do not give lectures except those on *lixue*".²

Emperor Zhu Yuanzhang stipulated that the imperial examination must use Zhu Xi's views as the standard. Because Zhu Xi focused on the texts of Confucius and Mencius in the formulation of *lixue*, these texts became most important to scholars. Scholars submitted to the emperor's decree about Zhu Xi's books, and did not dare to advocate other views.³

The rulers of the Qing Dynasty also esteemed *lixue* as the wisdom of the ages.

Emperor Kangxi of the Qing Dynasty highly appreciated Zhu Xi and said: "After Confucius and Mencius, Zhu Xi made the greatest contributions to their doctrine".⁴ He had a statue of Zhu Xi erected in the main hall of the Confucius Temple. During the Qing dynasty Zhu Xi's influence was not only extended to monuments, but also to the syllabus of the imperial examinations. In order to pass the imperial examination one first needed to answer correctly questions on *Si Shu* (*The Four Books*),⁵ with the standard commentary in the Qing Dynasty being Zhu Xi's commentary.⁶

² Chen Ding. *Donglin liezhuan* (*Selected Biographies of Donglin*). 10 vols. Block-printed edition, the time of publish is unknown. vol. 2. p. 14.

³ Zhu Yizun. *Dao zhuan lu xu*. Quote from *Zhonghua wenhua shi* (*The History of Chinese Culture*). Feng Tianyu. 1994. Shanghai: Shanghai Renmin Chubanshe: pp. 762-63.

⁴ Feng Tianyu, He Xiaoming and Zhou Jiming. *Zhongguo wenhuashi* (*The History of Chinese Culture*). Shanghai: Shanghai Renmin Chubanshe, 1994, p. 890.

⁵ *Si shu*, (*The Four Books*): *Da xue*, (*The Great Learning*), *Zhong yong*, (*The Doctrine of the Mean*), *Lun yu*, (*The Analects of Confucius*), *Meng zi*, (*Mencius*).

⁶ Yong Rong and Ji Yun. *Siku quanshu zongmu* (*A Title Catalogue and Summary for The Encyclopaedia of Classics, Histories, Philosophers and Belles- Lettres*). Taipei: Taiwan Shangwu Yinshuguan, Yingyinben, 1983. *Jingbu*, vol. 36. p. 745.

The basic tenet of *lixue* that concerns us here is its moral restriction on women. According to *lixue*, the wife must be faithful to her husband till death. Therefore, “starving to death was a small matter, but being unfaithful was utterly intolerable”⁷. This, to the *lixue* Confucianism school, was *tianli* (the course of nature). *Tian* meant sky and *li* meant theory and law, so the term *tianli* meant that these laws were universal and therefore unquestionable. In the matter of how to treat human desire, Zhu Xi said, “For the course of nature to exist, human desire must die; if human desire wins, the course of nature is destroyed”⁸. Under the newly constructed social order of *lixue*, Chinese women’s sufferings were unprecedented.

4.1.2 The Effect of *Lixue* on Theatrical Circles

The ideology of *lixue* was always reflected in traditional plays. In the *jingju Sanyuan ji* (*The Top Candidate in All Three Examinations*), the heroine Qin Xuemei was portrayed as a typical follower of the doctrine of *lixue*. Qin Xuemei was engaged to Shanglang, who was infected with a deadly disease and died soon after. Although the two had not been married at the time of Shanglang’s death, Qin vowed to live in widowhood and never remarry so as to be dutiful to her husband. Qin Xuemei’s father wanted to stop her from making such a decision, but in her defence she cited the Confucian moral code that a good wife should never remarry. On the day Shanglang’s body was laid out for viewing in the mourning hall, Qin saw a young

⁷ Cheng Hao and Cheng Yi. *Ercheng Yishu* (*Cheng Hao and Cheng Yi’s Posthumous Papers*). Xiaolang Huanshanguan Chongkeben, 1747, vol. 22

⁸ Zhu Xi. *Zhuzi Yulie* (*The Quotations of Zhu Xi*), Li Jingde, ed. Wang Xingxian punctuate, Taipei: Huashi Chubanshe, 1987, vol.13. p. 224.

girl kneeling close by her, weeping bitterly. After inquiring about this girl, Qin discovered that she was Shanglang's concubine Aiyu, and that she was three months pregnant. Qin Xuemei, as Shang's widow, was obliged to care for Shang's parents-in-law and any of Shang's children, even if they were not her own. Qin was thus compelled to raise Aiyu's child, a boy named Shanglu. Later, under her tutelage and care, Shanglu topped the provincial and the national examinations, as well as the final oral examination given by the emperor himself, for which the emperor rewarded Qin Xuemei. This script, *The Top Candidate in All Three Examinations* originated in the Ming Dynasty, and was continuously performed until the Qing Dynasty. In this script, the two pieces *Xuemei diaoxiao* (*Qin Xuemei Cries at the Mourning Hall*) and *Xuemei jiaozi* (*Qin Xuemei Teaches the Shang Family's Son*) were very popular, and had a great influence on Chinese society at that time.

In the Qing Dynasty, literary works about loyal widows could be found everywhere. A popular song from the *Che Wang Fu* Repertoire, *Xianliang nü diaoxiao* (*A Virtuous Lady Mourns her Fiancé*) is a good example, which was based on a true story. Wang Bingwen's daughter Wang Xiaole was engaged to Zhang Guoyun. Zhang died and Wang Xiaole learnt from the heroine of *The Top Candidate in All Three Examinations*, Qin Xuemei, to grieve and live as a widow. Another example is a Qing novel *Rulin waishi* (*The Scholars*). In the book Wang Yufei's son-in-law died, and his daughter wanted to commit suicide to be with her husband. Her parents-in-law wept bitterly, but Wang Yufei persuaded and comforted them: "I have been thinking about this carefully. If my daughter truly wishes to die for her

husband, then let her do so.” He then said to his daughter: “My child, if you wish to die for your husband, you will remain immortal in the book of history, and why should I stop you?” His daughter starved herself for eight days and died. Wang laughed loudly: “A good death! A good death!” As a result, local authorities submitted a report to the imperial court. The emperor praised her death in honour of her husband, and ordered the erection of a monument to her.⁹

Although the *lixue* moral code strove to teach people about chastity, it ended up making them narrow-minded. When this imposed morality became set in people’s minds and was practiced by widows, it amounted to the socially sanctioned murder of women.

Early Confucianism differed from the later school of *lixue* in that it respected human desire and sexual passions. Confucius is quoted as saying that: “[f]ood and sex are both human needs.” The original Confucian view of marriage was not so dogmatic as that of *lixue*. Marriage was valued and widowhood was not particularly revered. Before the ideology of *lixue* penetrated society’s attitudes, women were allowed to remarry. In *Shiji* (*Record of History*), for example, Prime Minister Chen Ping’s wife had been married five times before her marriage to Chen Ping.¹⁰ She was not condemned for this. In the Han Dynasty (206 B.C.-220 AD), a remarried lady became empress. In the Three Kingdoms (220-280), Cai Wenji, a famous female writer, married three times.

⁹ Wu Jingzi. *Rulin waishi* (*The Scholars*). Beijing: Renmin Wenxue Chubanshe, 1982, pp. 553-54.

¹⁰ Sima Qian. *Shiji* (*Record of History*). Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1982, p. 2051.

However, under the influence of *lixue*, things changed. For example, Li Guangdi, a Confucianist of great repute in the Qing Dynasty, imposed a family law on the women of the Li family, according to which they must die if their fiancés die.¹¹ Another example is to be found in *Xiuning xianzhi* (*Annals of Xiuning County*). In this county, with a population of only sixty thousand at the time, there were more than two thousand “virtuous” women between the early Qing Dynasty and the reign of Daoguang. Of these women, some hanged themselves, some had taken poison, some had starved themselves to death and others had not remarried when their husbands died.¹² These women could have become heroines in the *lixue* literature. In fact, it was such heroines in *lixue* plays that taught women to accept this cruel code.

The influence of *lixue* on traditional Chinese theatre is also evident in a series of so-called “guarding against obscenity and robbery” scripts, which defended the traditional moral principles. One example is the play *Fengliu jian* (*Lessons in Depravity*): In Xiangfu County, Kaifeng Prefecture, there was a rich landlord by the family name of Tang. One day, Tang, his wife and their daughter went to a *xiqu*. His daughter felt unwell and went home before her parents. When Tang and his wife returned home, they discovered that their daughter was missing. Someone reported seeing a young couple heading north. Landlord Tang guessed that his daughter had run away from home, and quickly ordered his family to search for her. Miss Tang

¹¹ Yue Yuxi, Li Quan and Ma Liangkuan. *Fu Sinian - daqipangbo de yidai xueren* (*The Great Scholar Fu Sinian*). Tianjin: Tianjin Renmin Chubanshe, 1994, p. 73

¹² Feng Tianyu, He Xiaoming and Zhou Jiming. *Zhongguo wenhuashi* (*The History of Chinese Culture*). Shanghai: Shanghai Renming Chubanshe, 1994, p. 887.

had indeed run away with a scholar named Zhou Wencai. They were soon caught and brought before the local authorities. Miss Tang confessed that her father read pornographic books and watched amorous plays, and that he had unconsciously influenced her. Zhou, in turn, said that his teacher called himself a romantic scholar, and he often read such books as *The Story of the Western Chamber*, *Qing-shi* (*History of Romance*).

The author of *Lessons from Depravity* is Yu Zhi (1809-1874) of Jiangsu Province, who became a teacher after five unsuccessful attempts at the imperial examination. His play collection *Shujitang jinyue* (*Modern Theatre of Shuji Hall*) includes twenty-eight plays, that are virtual moral sermons, and *Lessons from Depravity* is one example. Yu Zhi believed that *xiqu* and literature had an important influence on people's morality. *Lessons from Depravity* was meant to convey to audience that the dissolute behaviour of landlord Tang and Zhou's teacher, reading pornographic books and watching amorous *xiqu*, had influenced the young couple to elope. Such obscene books and plays should therefore be banned. The pornographic book and amorous play in question were *The Water Margin*¹³ and *The Story of the Western Chamber*. Yu Zhi even suggested to the prefectural and provincial governors that the

¹³ Yu Zhi's *Yingxiong pu* (*Record of Heroes*) is a play so-called "guarding against robbery". The play is about Wang Haier who was a rogue. He joined Chen Jing and Shi San in banditry at the Wulong hill. One day, a brave man Zhao Wenxiong passed by, and killed both Wang Haier and Chen Jing while they were robbing others. Shi San was captured and sent to the government office. Shi confessed that he saw a play called *shuifu xi* (*The Water Margin*), and he thought that bandits were heroes who were all famous and rich. Thus, he and his two friends had turned to banditry. The magistrate beheaded Shi San and the banned *The Story of the Western Chamber* and *The Water Margin*. The purpose of the play was to warn people against robbery.

performances of *The Story of the Western Chamber* and *The Water Margin* (as well as the original novel) be banned.

Another effect of the *lixue* moral code in theatrical circles was that traditional Chinese plays were also censored and rewritten in accordance with the *lixue* moral precepts. Apologists for *lixue* adopted a “change of heart” method to rewrite traditional plays. Yu Zhi in his *De yi lu (From An Experience)* states that, “the rewrite method can avoid the measure of banning obscene books, and it can create a standard for books...Some can be added to and some abridged. Their names are not changed, but their hearts have been changed. Once the books that have had great influence have cleansed their dross, they will be better”.¹⁴ In the “*Che Wang Fu* Repertoire”, *The Story of the Western Chamber* is one script that has had its “heart” changed.

The Story of the Western Chamber tells the tale of Zhang Sheng and Cui Yingying. Their love began with their first encounter. When he caught sight of Cui Yingying in a monastery, Zhang Sheng claimed that “love-sickness had penetrated the very marrow” of his bones. They were eventually able to express their love for each other in the western chamber of the monastery. When Yingying’s mother discovered the affair, separation was inevitable. Her mother would consent to the marriage only if Zhang Sheng passed the state examination and obtained an official post. Zhang

¹⁴ Yu Zhi. *Deyi lu (From An Experience)*. Guangzhou: Yangcheng Aiyu Shantang, 1871, vol. 11. p. 14.

Sheng left immediately for the capital, and after success in the official examination, was at last able to marry Cui Yingying.¹⁵

The Story of the Western Chamber was written in the Yuan Dynasty by Wang Shifu. After the play had its “heart” changed in the mid-Qing Dynasty the following scenes were added. In the scene *Dingyuan* (*Top in the Examination*), Zhang Sheng went to the capital city to sit for the imperial examination. After the gods who controlled scholars, Wenchang Di and Guangsheng Di read all the examination papers, they thought that Zhang Sheng’s paper was the best and he should become the *zhuangyuan*¹⁶ (ie: the top candidate). However, they discovered that Zhang Sheng’s examination paper had a strange scent, rather like rouge and powder. They ordered a guard to investigate Zhang Sheng and discovered that he was having secret meetings with Miss Cui Yingying. As a result, Zhang Sheng’s ranking in the imperial examination was downgraded from first position to third place.

Another scene that was added is *Meng bang* (*Reading the Bang*¹⁷ *in a Dream*). When Zhang Sheng went to the capital city to sit for the imperial examination, his girlfriend Cui Yingying missed him badly. One night, in a dream, the god Wenchang Di took her to the capital city to see the *bang*. He told Cui Yingying that Zhang Sheng had come first in the imperial examination, but Cui Yingying later found that

¹⁵ For the summary of *The Story of the Western Chamber*, and its English translation consults Shih Chungwen *The Golden Age of Chinese Drama: Yuan Tsa-chu*, Princeton University Press, 1976.

¹⁶ *Zhuangyuan* is the title conferred on the student who comes first in the highest level of the imperial examination.

¹⁷ *Bang*: The official published list of successful candidates in the imperial examination.

Zhang Sheng was not the top or the second ranked scholar. Because he had illicit sexual relations that damaged his scholarly honour, he had been given only third place.

These scenes were not part of the original version. The plots were added by apologists of *lixue* when they rewrote *The Story of the Western Chamber*. In the original version, Zhang Sheng was not denied the first position of *Zhuangyuan*. With the addition, the subversive spirit of the original play was transformed into a defence of traditional moral principles.

4.1.3 Opposition to *Lixue* in Academic and Literary Circles

From a Confucian social and ideological perspective, teaching people to be loyal and faithful was regarded as positive. To restrain desires in order to enhance self-cultivation was also considered a positive value. However, when *lixue* became extreme and dogmatic, it also became unreasonable. Therefore, from the middle of the Ming Dynasty, thinkers began to dispute over *lixue* and the question of the “elimination of desire”. At this time, Wang Gen, who was a member of the Taizhou Academy, presented a famous topic for debate: “Anything necessary for the live of common people is lawful.” Li Zhi, who inherited the Taizhou Academic School, took up Wang Gen’s topic and further developed. “Clothes and food are the innate need of human beings. Nothing is the innate law of human beings except clothes and food. Everything in the universe is only for wearing and eating. Thus, for the

common people, food and clothing is everything. Nothing else concerns them as much”.¹⁸ Unfortunately, Li Zhi was regarded as “a dangerous extremist” and persecuted until his death.

The thinkers of the Qing Dynasty continued the debate between the “*lixue* moral code” and “human desire”. Wang Fuzhi, for example, held that the course of nature detached from the material world, as claimed by *lixue* thinkers, was non-existent, while Gu Yanwu opposed *lixue*’s empty talk. Yan Yuan pointed out that “for over one thousand years, it was Zhu Xi who led scholars to study ancient books in a mechanical way, exhausting all their energies, and making them weak, sick and useless”.¹⁹ The most dedicated fighter against *lixue* asceticism was probably Dai Zhen of Xiuning County, Anhui province. “In 1762, on the recommendation of his county, he was ordered by the Emperor to re-edit *Yongle dadian* (*Yongle Encyclopaedia*). He was on the Imperial editorial committee for *The Encyclopaedia of Classics, Histories, Philosophers and Belles- Lettres*, and produced many works”.²⁰ During his traditional textual research, Dai came to believe that *lixue* Confucianism and its followers used their theory and concepts to persecute people, which was in essence no different to that of a cruel official murdering a citizen. To counterattack *lixue*, he asserted that “truth is within desire”. Other traditional Chinese thinkers, such as Wang Zhong and Qian Daxin, used examples of classical

¹⁸ Li Zhi. *Fenshu* (*Burning Books*). 2 vols. Preface by Wang Benke 1598. Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1974, vol. 1. p. 127.

¹⁹ Yuan Yuan. *Zhuzi yulie ping* (*Comment on the Classified Quotation of Zhuzi*). Quoted in Xia Zhengnong Chief editor. *Cihai* (*Chinese Dictionary*). Shanghai: Shanghai Cishu Chubanshe, 1980, p. 1850.

Confucian rituals written in ancient books to refute the theories of *lixue*, dismissing the doctrine that women could not remarry as a fallacy. Ji Yun in his miscellany *Yuewei caotang biji* (*Miscellany from Yuewei Thatched Cottage*) also recorded many stories about how *lixue* scholars used their theories to persecute people. In this way, in the middle of the Qing Dynasty, many masters of traditional learning found themselves promoting a non-traditional or a counter-cultural position. “The outcome of their research was contrary to what they expected, and created favourable conditions for the development of new ideas”.²¹

These disputes over the value of the *lixue* ideology were reflected in the literature, *xiqu* and art of the time. For example, the novelist Ling Mengchu described the conflict between passion and philosophical theory in his *Erke pai an jingqi* (*The Second Collection of Striking the Table in Amazement*), “The world contained many unfair situations. If the husband died and his wife remarried, she would be said to have lost her chastity, ruining her reputation, and dirtying her body, and everyone would maintain that this was sinful. In contrast, when a man lost his wife, he could remarry as many times as he wanted, and buy concubines and maids. That is the reason that many women felt it was not fair”.²² Thus Feng Menglong and Ling Mengchu’s novel protested against the inequities for women.

²⁰ Li Dou. *Yangzhou huafang lu* (*Record of Pleasure Boats in Yangzhou*). Yangzhou: Jiangsu Guangling Guji Kejinshe, 1984, p. 220.

²¹ Yu Yingshi. “Wusi yundong yu zhongguo chuantong” (The May 4th Movement and Chinese Tradition). In *Lianfu sanshi nian wenxue daxi pinglun ji* (*A Collection of Thirty Years’ Writing on Chinese Literature by Lianfu*). Taipei: Lianhe Baoshe, 1981, p. 312.

²² Ling Mengchu. *Erke paian jingqi* (*A Reprint of An Extraordinary Fantastic Story in two volumes*). Shangyou Tang, 1632. Quoted in Feng Tianyu. *Zhongguo wenhuashi* (*The History of Chinese Culture*). Shanghai: Shanghai Renming Chubanshe, 1994, p. 778.

Tang Xianzhu's play *Mudan ting* (*Peony Pavilion*) was another battle song that showed human desires could not be destroyed. The plays of Pu Songling's *Liaozhai zhiyi* (*Strange Tales from the Leisure Studio*), Wu Jingzi's *Rulin waishi* (*The Scholars*), Cao Xueqin's *Honglou meng* (*Dream of the Red Chamber*), all expressed their personal opinions supporting human passion in this intense ideological controversy. Furthermore, issues of individuality, freedom and social change were raised in the fight against traditional *lixue* thinking.

4.1.4 Subversion of *Lixue* in Theatrical Circles

In line with the new thinking, *jingju* and many regional theatres of this period created new romantic plays, such as, *Xia henan* (*Traveling to Henan*), *Qiao yinyuan*, (*Coincidental Wedding*), *Dui linghua* (*An Exchanged Wedding*), *Longfeng pei* (*A Great Marriage*), *Yanzhi hu* (*A Marvelous Courtesan*). The love story play in this era portrayed the enormous pressure of the *lixue* moral code on young couples' love life on the one hand, and the fact that human emotions cannot be suppressed, on the other.

A good example is *Meiyu pei* (*Marriage in a Closet*), which was created by a Manchu playwright of the late Qing, Song Maoru. The play is about the love story between Xu Tingmei and Su Yulian. Scholar Xu Tingmei, on the way to the capital

to sit for the imperial examination, met Su Yulian at a Buddhist temple, and fell in love at first sight. Su Yulian dropped her handkerchief, Xu Tingmei thought that she had dropped it in order to catch his attention, and this aroused his passion even more. Xu explained his predicament to Huang Po, the hostess of the inn where he was staying, and asked her how he could arrange a meeting with Su. Huang Po told him to disguise himself as a domestic servant and to sneak into the Su mansion to return the handkerchief. Though Su loved Xu she was frightened out of her wits at Xu's sudden appearance. When Xu returned the handkerchief and tried to leave, he found the door of Su mansion locked. Fearing gossip, Su had to hide Xu in a closet for over ten days, and very anxious the whole time. Han Cuizhu, her sister-in-law and the wife of the newly appointed Minister of Personal Affairs, noticed her unaccountable melancholy. She observed Su carefully and discovered her secret. Han Cuizhu decided to help Xu and Su. She burned down Su's room, and claimed that Su had died in the fire, but in fact she had secretly let Su escape with Xu. The play ends with Xu becoming the top candidate in the highest level of the imperial examination, marrying Su and being reunited with his family in wealth and happiness.

The closet in *A Marriage in a Closet* is only a stage property, but it symbolized the pressure of the *lixue* moral code. Why did Xu need to hide in the closet for over ten days? It would have been a very straightforward matter for him to leave the mansion if he could have asked her family servants to open the doors for him. However, in an era when *lixue* was dominant, one's reputation was most important and men and women could not be seen together in private. A secret meeting between Xu and Su

could not have been properly explained to others, and if Xu had been seen walking out of Su's room, both of them would have been utterly discredited and Su's life ruined.

The heavy pressure of the *lixue* moral code was also reflected in the decision that Han Cuizhu made. According to her position in the family, she could have simply allowed Xu and Su to escape secretly. Yet she bravely decided to burn down Su's room, because of the enormous pressure of the *lixue* moral code: if Su had run away with her lover with everyone knowing about it, Han's husband's position as a minister would have been damaged. The only solution to save the reputation of the Su family was to plot Su's fake death in the fire.

A Marriage in a Closet showed that human emotions could not be suppressed.

Although both Xu and Su were very concerned about their reputation and chastity, it did not mean that they had no desire and passion. When Han Cuizhu worked out a solution that enabled them to elope, Su immediately agreed. However, in deciding between reputation and love, she courageously chose love and escaped with him. Love finally won over the *lixue* moral code.

Another important theme of love story play was the capability of women and their positive roles in marriage. In the play sequence *Yangjia jiang* (*Generals of the Yang Family*), *Mu Guiying zhaoqin* (*Mu Guiying Proposes Marriage*) was a love play that was utterly different to other traditional plays. Mu Guiying, the heroine of the sequence, grew up in the Muke Mountain stronghold in Shandong province. She was

intelligent and courageous, and especially skilled in horse-riding and archery. Yang Zhongbao was on his way to Wutai Mountain to ask his uncle Yang Wulang for help. As he was passing the Muke Mountain stronghold, Mu Guiying bravely proposed marriage to him.

Yang Zhongbao: Don't you feel ashamed talking about nothing but marriage? Take guard
against my spear.

Mu Gui Ying: How embarrassing! (Starts fighting).²³

Yang Zhongbao fought twice and lost twice, so he was obliged to yield to Mu Guiying and agreed to marry her. She then, as Yang's wife, pledged allegiance to the Song military camp of the Yang family. In the war against Liao, she was strategic in breaking through the enemy's defence position, bringing victory to the Song. After the death of her husband, her grandmother-in-law, She Taijun, took command and led twelve widows of the Yang family on an expedition to Liao. Mu Guiying was fifty years old at the time, but she still served in the vanguard. She penetrated far behind enemy lines and fought fiercely against the invasion.

The typical context of love stories in plays of the Qing Dynasty, particularly in *jingju*, was quite different from the earlier plays of the Yuan and Ming Dynasties, where love was experienced "amongst the flowers and beneath the moon" or where "the man is on a horse and woman is in the garden". In *jingju*, love can blossom on the battlefield or even in jail. For example, Hu Xiaoying, was a heroine in the play

sequence *Xianglian pai* (*Lotus Handkerchief*). The setting of Hu's love was on a battlefield, bloody but replete with romantic atmospherics.²⁴ In *Famen si* (*Famen Temple*), the context was a gloomy prison.

These new contexts for love also gave women new roles. Mu Guiying and Hu Xiaoying were brave and skilful soldiers in battle, helping their husbands or fiancés to win a number of military exploits. Song Qiaojiao, in *Famen Temple*, fought for the release of her fiancé, who was wrongfully imprisoned. She Caihua, in the play *Qixing miao* (*Seven Stars Temple*), was a strong and talented woman who became a commanding general. In these plays, playwrights stressed the positive role of women in society. These plays reflected the changing social positions and roles of women, as well as acting as vehicles for the protest by playwrights against traditional moral codes, which despised women.

The positive role of women in relation to their marriages was another theme of these plays. Women were no longer passive, but took the initiative in love. In the play *Qiao Yinyuan* (*Coincidental Wedding*) Miss Hu, dressed in her brother Hu Lin's formal clothes acted as his proxy at his wedding, because he was called away on official business on his wedding day. His bride, Fenglian, however, did not want to marry him, so she asked her cousin, Tang Wei, to disguise himself in her bridal costume and substitute for her at the wedding. When Miss Hu discovered Tang Wei

²³ Liu Liemao, Su Huanzhong and Guo Jingrui, eds. *Che Wang Fu quben jinghua*, (*The Essence of the Che Wang Fu Repertoire*). Guangzhou: Zhongshan Daxue Chubanshe, 1991-1993, vol. 2, p. 445.

²⁴ *Ibid.* vol. 4, pp. 314-21.

in the bridal chamber after the wedding, she found him a striking man and frankly expressed her attraction for him. They declared their love for each other and exchanged pledges and gifts. Miss Hu's initiative in expressing her love led to her marriage to Tang Wei. Others examples of women choosing their lover or husbands are Miss Bai, in *Traveling to Henan*, Mu Guiying and Hu Xiaoying. This was the first time that such powerful women, choosing their lovers and husbands, appeared in the history of Chinese *xiqu* and represented a significant new direction in the development of the complexity of theme and context in the plays.

This new direction is typically demonstrated in the play *Tiegong yuan (A Love Story about the Steel Bow)*. It depicted General Wang's widow, Mrs. Wang, and his daughter Wang Xiuying, who opened a teahouse in Taiyuan City. Before General Wang died, he left a steel bow to his family, and told them that whoever could pull this steel bow can be his son-in-law. One day, the son of the Military Commander of Taiyuan City, Shi Fu, went round singsong houses along with his servants. When he passed Wang's teahouse and saw Wang Xiuying. Shi Fu, relying on his father's power and position, attempted to take liberties with Wang Xiuying, but was kicked out by Mrs. Wang. By coincidence, a young General named Kuang Yin came by and helped Mrs. Wang to throw out Shi Fu and his servants. Afterward, Wang Xiuying invited Kuang Yin to her teahouse as a way of paying gratitude. They exchanged martial arts skills in the backyard. When Wang Xiuyin saw Kuang Yin was able to pull her family steel bow, she realized that Kung Yin had great martial arts skills and she fell in love with him. Mrs. Wang was also satisfied with Kuang Yin as her future

son-in-law. They fixed a time for the wedding to take place after three days. On the other hand, Shi Fu harboured resentment in his heart. Subsequently, Shi Fu and his father collaborated to frame-up Kuang Yin. Commander Shi ordered Kuang Yin, together with ten weak soldiers to carry the soldiers' pay to a military camp. At the same time, he called upon his followers to act as bandits and robbed the pay from Kuang Yin. Since Kuang Yin had lost the soldiers' pays, he was sentenced to a distant place for penal servitude. Wang Xiuying eagerly longed for Kuang Yin to come back, but instead, Shi Fu came, along with a bridal sedan chair, to capture the bride for marriage. Wang Xiuying and her mother defeated Shi's group and seized Shi Fu. Shi Fu had no other option but to tell Wang Xiuying the truth. Wang Xiuying, who dressed as a man, with her mother hurried on their journey to rescue Kuang Yin. The play ended with Kuang Yin being successfully rescued by Wang Xiuying, and thus completed the love story of the steel bow.

Compared with Su Yulian in *A Marriage in a Closet*, Wang Xiuying of *A Love Story about the Steel Bow* is a more modern woman. The creation of *A Marriage in a Closet* has inherited greater elements of the traditions from *zaju* and *chuanqi*. In contrast, *A Love Story about the Steel Bow* clearly demonstrates a new direction. Wang Xiuying was bright, brave, competent and unafraid of any difficulties. As the daughter of a military General, she inherited the greatest legacy of her father – great martial arts skills and a steel bow. This enabled her to show no fear in face of rascals. She had not only put Shi Fu to rout, but also defeated and captured him. Due to poverty, Wang Xiuying and her mother had to support themselves by opening a

teahouse. Having to serve customers and be seen by the public, Wang Xiuying could never be like Su Yulian staying in her boudoir. Living in a busy city and running a business caused Wang's behaviour to be vastly different from the traditional teachings of Confucianism. Therefore, when she saw the one she loved, all she showed was an enthusiasm towards love. When Kuang Yin was framed, Wang Xiuying had her own definite plan, and was able to conquer all difficulties to rescue her fiancée. Whether it is love or family relationships, the image of Wang Xiuying no longer reflects the notion of women being dependent upon men, but rather, she demonstrates equality between the sexes.

In the Chinese traditional moral code, every aspect of women's lives was regulated. The ancient textbook *Nü jiao pian* (*Instructions to Women*) had strict standards for standing, sitting, walking, speaking, and smiling. Women were forbidden to go out of their houses,²⁵ or to sit with men;²⁶ women could only live in a very limited circle and they could not undertake social activities independently. Women who were enthusiastic and frank were looked upon as frivolous. Women who dared to think and act were also seen as violating *lixue* principles. Therefore, the characters of these plays were profoundly subversive of the *lixue* moral code in their promotion human values and the liberation of the individual character.

²⁵ See Feng Tianyu, He Xiaoming and Zhou Jiming. *Zhongguo wenhuashi* (*The History of Chinese Culture*). Shanghai: Shanghai Renming Chubanshe, 1994, p. 656.

²⁶ He Ruilin. *Nüer jing* (*Regulations of Women*). In Zhang Fuqing ed. *Nü jie* (*Admonish Women*). Beijing: Zhongyang Minzhudaxue Chubanshe, 1996, p. 132.

4.2 Religion in Plays

The other two religious cultures of China, Buddhism and Taoism also exerted an important influence on Chinese literature and theatre. By the Qing Dynasty, the basic tenets of both Buddhism and Taoism, that one's life is empty or consists of nothingness, functioned as a moral law similar to *lixue*'s elimination of desire.

In Chinese traditional culture, religious themes were a feature of many artistic forms, such as *xiqu*, popular songs, poetry and prose. Sometimes they were used for propagating religious scriptures. Sometimes, authors used religious values as a basis for reflecting and commenting on society, or philosophical discussions of these religions. Under the keen promotion by the Qing emperors, the authority of all religions was greatly enhanced. Religious theatre, too, reached its peak in this period. However, these plays were complex, representing the opposing trends of the promotion of religion and the criticism of religion.

4.2.1 Buddhism and Taoism in Theatre

Taoism, as a native religion of China, was mainly a combination of the traditional folk religions, *Fangshu* (the practices of the necromancy), and the philosophies of Laozi and Zhuangzi. The earliest extant examples of religious poems and song are quoted in the *Jiuge* (*The Nine Songs*) of Qu Yuan (about 340 B.C.-278 B. C.).

Taoism emerged as an organized religion with a creed in the Eastern Han Dynasty

(25-220), accompanied by a proliferation of Taoist tales and stories, which were dramatized in the Yuan Dynasty (1279-1368). The most popular Taoist plays in the Yuan Dynasty were *Zhangsheng zhuhai* (*Zhang Sheng Cooks The Sea*) and *Liuyi chuanshu* (*Liu Yi's Message*). In the Qing Dynasty Taoist plays reached even greater heights, the grandest being *Fengshen tian bang* (*Investitures of the Gods*), based on a popular novel with the same title. It was performed at the imperial court.

Buddhism, first introduced to China from India in 67 A.D (the Eastern Han Dynasty), gradually played a more and more important part in Chinese traditional society. It was significant in the political and cultural unification of China and Tibet in the Tang Dynasty, and, in the Song Dynasty, of Khitan of Eastern Hu, Dangxiang of Western Hu²⁷ and the Song Chinese. In the Yuan and Qing Dynasties (1644-1911), the emperors used Buddhism to cement the relationship between the Mongol, Tibetans and Han nationalities.²⁸

The emperors of the early Qing Dynasty enthusiastically promoted religion, particularly Buddhism, undertaking large-scale Buddhist temple projects.²⁹ In this period Buddhist play were also produced on the grandest scale ever seen. For example, Zhang Zhao's (1691-1745) *Golden Rule for Advocating Virtue* was in ten volumes with two hundred and forty scenes.

²⁷ Khitan of Eastern Hu and Dangxiang of Western Hu were non-Han nationality living in the north and east China in ancient times.

²⁸ See Tian Zhaoyuan. *Shenhua Yu zhongguo shehui* (*Mythology and Chinese Society*). Shanghai: Shanghai Renmin Chubanshe. 1998, pp. 355-444.

²⁹ See Feng Tianyu, He Xiaoming and Zhou Jiming. *Zhongguo wenhuashi* (*The History of Chinese Culture*). Shanghai: Shanghai Renmin Chubanshe, 1994, p. 853.

The *Golden Rule for Advocating Virtue* originated from two Buddhist scriptures the *Avalambana* and another one that is now lost, and the popular Buddhist tract (*bianwen*) explaining the *Avalambana*, of the Tang Dynasty. The *Avalambana* was “translated into Chinese under the title *Yulanpen jing* by the great monk Fahu. This scripture tells how Mulian descends to one of the Buddhist hells to see his mother, who was undergoing punishment for her wicked life. He gives her food, but she cannot eat it because it is changed into burning coals before entering her mouth. Buddha tells Mulian that he can save his mother by making offerings of food and other things on the 15th of the 7th month”.³⁰

The story of Mulian was dramatized in the Song Dynasty. The Song scholar Meng Yuanlao noted that, “Actors performed *Mulian jiumu* from the seventh until the fifteenth of the seventh month, and the audiences increased greatly”.³¹ That the performance continued for seven days indicates the grand scale of this play. Later, the Ming Dynasty playwright Zheng Zhizhen wrote another *Mulian* play *Mulian jiumu quanshan xiwen* (*Script for the Encouragement of Virtue: Mulian Saves his Mother*), which totalled three volumes with one hundred scenes. Zheng Zhizhen “from Xin’an in Anhui Province, was an actor of the Anhui troupe and famous for performing *Mulian xi*”.³² In the Qing Dynasty, Zhang Zhao rearranged Zheng

³⁰ Mackerras, Colin P. *The Rise of the Peking Opera*. London: Oxford University Press, 1972, p. 254.

³¹ Meng Yuanlao. *Dongjing menghua luli* (*A Record of a Daydream in Dongjing*). 10 vols. In *Biji xiaoshou daguan* (*A Comprehensive Collection of Short Stories*), no.9. Taipei: Xinxing Shuju, 1984, vol. 8, p. 5.

³² Zhou Yibai. *Zhongguo xiqu shi* (*A History of Chinese Theatre*). 3 vols. Shanghai: Zhonghua Gufen Youxian Gongsi, 1953, vol. 3, p. 684.

Zhizhen's version for the imperial court theatre, changing its name to *Golden Rule for Advocating Virtue*.

After a thousand years of rearrangement by different playwrights, it is not surprising that Zheng Zhizen and Zhang Zhao's texts are different from the original Buddhist scripture. The setting and characters were sinicised with a strong Confucian ambience. The original story was considerably expanded with all kinds of dramatic detail added: Mulian came from a good, Buddhist family, but as a result of his father's death of disease, his mother Liushi became suspicious of Buddhism. She burnt all the Buddhist scriptures and no longer followed the Buddhist commandments. After her death, she suffered all kinds of punishment and disasters in hell. In order to save his mother, Mulian, overcoming all dangers, travelled to the Western Paradise to beg Buddha to forgive his mother. He then searched all the different hells, until he found his mother. Liushi repented her mistake and finally was saved.³³

The *Golden Rule for Advocating Virtue* was a very complex religious play. Its undoubted purpose was to publicize Buddhism, to teach people to be loyal, and to preach Confucian filial piety, but the character of Liushi adds a new dimension to this play. In her agony at the death of her husband, Liushi dared to challenge her religion, burning the Buddhist scriptures and deliberately flouting the Buddhist laws. She suffered the multitudinous torments of the various Buddhist hells before finally being rescued by her son. As a tragic heroine, Liushi joins that band of passionate

evildoers such as Neauba, Clytemnestra and Medusa, compelling and repulsive at the same time.

The subsidiary plots, *Leida shi er* (*Punishing the Ten Evils*), which were added in the Ming-Qing Dynasties, were a series of plots adapted from tales about the cruel punishment of people who refused to accept Buddhism. However, far from attracting people to Buddhism, these short plays had the effect of frightening people away. In effect they were an indictment of Buddhism, which constitutes, as indicated earlier, the second important trend in Qing Dynasty *xiqu*.

4.2.2 The Criticism of Religion in Plays

Critical attitudes towards religious morality, which gained prevalence from the middle of the Qing Dynasty, was reflected in, and, to some extent, even promoted by, *xiqu*. The subsidiary plots or short plays *Punishing the Ten Evils* of the *Golden Rule for Advocating Virtue*, and the play *Pishan jiumu* (*A Son Cleaves a Mountain to Save his Mother*) were important examples of this trend. As illustration, I will discuss two short plays of *Punish Ten Evils*, *Sifang* (*Longing for the World*) and *Xiangtiao* (*Flirtation of a Monk and Nun*) were *bangzi* (clapper theatre) tunes,³⁴ which were an important part of the repertoire of the Anhui troupe and subsequently of *jingju*.

³³ The content is from “*Che Wang Fu Repertoire*”.

Longing for the World is about a young Buddhist nun called Sekong who lived in *Xiantao an* (Immortal Peach Nunnery). Her parents, devout Buddhists, sent her to *Xiantao an* when she was a child. She grew up to be a beautiful lady, burning incense and reading the Buddhist scriptures everyday, but she felt lonely when she saw young couples came to pray and she was miserable having to sleep alone in the dark. "Time will pass, I will become old and never marry." Finally, she decided to escape from the nunnery "Even if I die in the Palace of Hell, let them use the treadle-operated tilt hammer to grind me, cut me with a saw, mull me with a mill, fry me into boiling oil! Let them! Let them! I have only known human suffering, but I have never seen ghosts also wearing chains! What is a live Buddha? Where is the Bodhisattva? I do not care about them! The fire is singeing my eyebrows and I should look after myself".³⁵ Tearing off her *Kasaya*,³⁶ throwing away the incense plates, burying the scripture, she escaped down the mountain under the canopy of the moon and stars to seek an ordinary life.

The short play *Flirtation of a Monk and Nun*, develops Sekong's story further, focusing on the young monk Benwu who becomes her lover. Benwu grew up in a Buddhist temple in the mountains. One day, when he went down the mountain with his master to beg alms, he saw some beautiful girls and was shocked, as if he had seen female celestials. He could not forget them and decided to look for a young lady to marry, so he escaped down the mountain. On the road Benwu met Sekong, and

³⁴ *Longing for the World* was included in the catalogue of *bangzi* tune in the *Zhui baiqiu* (*A Selection of Play pieces*) that was edited by Wanhua Zuren and Qian Dechang in 1770.

³⁵ Liu Liemao, Su Huanzhong and Guo Jingrui, eds. *Che Wang Fu quben jinghua*, (*The Essence of the Che Wang Fu Repertoire*). Guangzhou: Zhongshan Daxue Chubanshe, 1991-1993, vol. 3, p. 308.

exchanged banter, only to fall deeply in love. “The man has the intention and the girl has the love. Neither is afraid of high mountains and deep waters”.³⁷ They decided to travel home together. As evening fell they came to a river, which blocked their way. Benwu carried Sekong on his back across the water. “That is good! That is good! That is really good”.³⁸ The play ends with a song praises of the young couple who conquer all with love and who will live happily together as man and wife.

Although *Longing for the World* and *Flirtation of a Monk and Nun* are Buddhist stories, they are subversive of the whole of traditional culture including Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism. By giving the nun the name Sekong (emptiness) and the monk Benwu (nothingness), which are principle concepts of these doctrines, the two plays satirize the basic principle of Buddhism and Taoism as do the soliloquies and dialogues. That Sekong and Benwu secretly fall in love with the person of their choice challenges the Confucian rule that one should accept one’s parents’ choice of marriage partner. Sekong and Benwu symbolize a type of human awakening. They question and reject the old-fashioned moral standards and beliefs in their quest for a new philosophy of life.

Another influential anti-religious love play of the later Qing Dynasty is *A Son Cleaves a Mountain to Save his Mother*, also known as *Baolian deng* (*Precious Lotus Flower Lamp*) or *Mangdang Shan* (*Mangdang Mountain*). This is a *jingju*,

³⁶ Kasaya: A patchwork outer vestment worn by Buddhist monks and nuns.

³⁷ Liu Liemao, Su Huanzhong and Guo Jingrui, eds. *Che Wang Fu quben jinghua*, (*The Essence of the Che Wang Fu Repertoire*). Guangzhou: Zhongshan Daxue Chubanshe, 1991-1993, vol. 3, p. 319.

³⁸ *Ibid.* p. 321.

which originated from the *nanxi* (Southern *xiqu*), *Liuxi chenxiang taizi* (*Liuxi and Crown Prince Chenxiang*) that underwent several transformations during the Yuan and Ming Dynasties.³⁹

A Son Cleaves a Mountain to Save his Mother is about the Erlangshen deity's sister Yuzhen, who assumed the name of the Third Female Deity and lived on Mangdang Mountain. Everyday she practiced the skills of a supernatural being in order to become a higher-level deity, but she felt very lonely. One day she met Liu Yanchang, a scholar on his way to the Capital City to sit for the imperial examination. They fell in love and, with the Flower Deity Precious Lotus Flower Lamp as their matchmaker and the Earth Deity as their witness, were happily married. When her brother, the Erlangshen deity, found out about this, he was so angry that he locked her in the *Yinshan* (*Dark Mountain*). She gave birth to a son named Chenxiang, whom the Earth Deity brought to his father Liu Yanchang. Later Chenxiang learnt military arts from the Piluoxian Deity and chopped the mountain open to save his mother. The family was finally reunited.

A Son Chops Mountain to Save his Mother is one of the most beautiful plays about a love affair between a human and a deity. It portrayed the unhappiness of the Third Female Deity, who was restricted by the complexity of the various religious commandments, and praised her for her strong desire for love. Erlangshen, her

³⁹ For example, Gu Zhongqing's *Chenxiang taizi pi huashan* (*Crown Prince Chenxiang Chops Huashan Mountain*) of the Yuan Dynasty (1279-1368) and Li Haogu's *Bailing shen pi huayue* (*Bailing Deity Chops Huashan Mountain*) of the Ming Dynasty, the texts of these are lost. In the reign

brother, was the gatekeeper of the Taoism's commandments, as well as embodying traditional Confucianism. When he reprimanded her, she argued that the marriage was not illegal because Precious Lotus Flower Lamp and the Earth Deity had acted as matchmakers. Her brother did not accept her argument, and she had to fight against her brother and the other deities using Taoist magic. Although she lost the battle, the fact that her son overcame Erlangshen and save his mother made the audience very happy.

These plays are but a few examples of the expression of a powerful upsurge of suspicion of, and hostility towards, traditional religions and established moral codes from the middle of the Qing Dynasty.

Sharp satire on Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism can also be found in the performance poetry and popular songs, as well as the plays in the *Che Wang Fu* Repertoire. The narrative poem, *Lingguan miao* (*Lingguan Temple*), is a particularly vivid example. Guangzhen, Abbess of Lingguan Temple, did not practice Buddhism seriously. Noblemen, officials and businessmen were always coming to the temple for 'rendezvous' and the temple seemed like a public drinking house. On the day of Guangzhen's birthday, her quarters were crowded with well-wishers attending her banquet. When everyone was drunk, the guests and nuns embraced and kissed. The

of Tongzhi (1862-1875) of the Qing Dynasty, there were some shuochang (a genre of popular entertainment consisting mainly of talking and singing) scripts on the same subjects.

formerly quiet temple became a dissolute place.⁴⁰ The *Che Wang Fu* Repertoire has many examples of plays, songs and the narrative poems, which show how religion and traditional moral code had lost their power to control the minds of the people by the mid-Qing Dynasty.

4.3 Liu San and His Courtesan Love Story Plays

The love lives of courtesans have been a continuing theme throughout the history of Chinese *xiqu*. From the Yuan Dynasty, “the most attractive popular theme for a playwright was the courtesan’s life. There were many courtesan plays in *Yuan zaju*. This is a reflection of the social phenomenon in the Yuan Dynasty of a large number of courtesans gathering in the city because of the impoverishment of peasants and lopsided development urban economy and international trade.”⁴¹ The Yuan playwrights had an intimate association with courtesans and entertainers and almost always portrayed them as passionate and honest. The thinking of playwrights thus generally diverged from traditional culture and moral codes. In *jingju* too, there were many courtesan love stories that depicted the conflict between the courtesan’s love and the traditional moral code. Liu San was the greatest exponent of this genre.

The dates of birth and death and real name of Liu San, also known as Niu San, are unknown. During the reign of Tongzhi (1862-1875), Liu went to Beijing and sat for

⁴⁰ Liu Liemao and Guo Jingrui, eds. *Qing Che Wang Fu chaocang quben zidishu (The Manchu Drum Songs in the Che Wang Fu Repertoire of the Qing Dynasty)*. Nanjing: Jiangsu Guji Chubanshe, 1993, vol. 1, pp. 266-69.

the imperial examination, but without success. He stayed in the capital and was employed to write *xiqu* scripts by the Sixi troupe of the Anhui company. He concealed his identity by using Liu San as his pen name. Liu San was always very poor and the actors in his troupe provided him with basic necessities of life. He died at sixty, and the cost of his funeral was borne by the actors.⁴²

Liu San's scripts included *Yanzhi hu* (*A Marvelous Courtesan*), *Yu linglong* (*A Wonderful Military Courtesan*), *Qinnü fu* (*The Good Fortune of an Unusual Girl*), *Deyi yuan* (*A Triumphant Marriage*) and *Dezheng fang* (*Memorial Gateway of Benevolent Rule*). Because Liu San had read many plays and seen a great deal of *xiqu*, he had considerable experience and his writings were popular.

Liu San created a series of typical female characters. Shi Zhongyu in *A Marvelous Courtesan* was good at both singing and dancing. The emperor heard of her accomplishments and summoned her, but she did not want to meet him and escaped from Yangzhou to Guiji City in Zhejiang Province, where she remained a courtesan. A military officer, General Wang Zhuyu, fell in love with her and they married. When Wang Zhuyu's senior officer, Li Jingran, heard the news, he arrested Wang Zhuyu and wanted to execute him. Many officers interceded for him but to no avail. Shi Zhongyu took on Li Jingran, quoting the classics in her argument, and he was unable to respond. The army was on Shi Zhongyu's side, even clamoured for Li

⁴¹ Zhang Geng and Guo Hancheng, chief eds. (*Zhongguo xiqu tongshi*) (*General History of Chinese Theatre*). Beijing: Zhongguo Xiju Chubanshe, 1984, vol. 1. p. 141.

⁴² Ma Shaobo, Zhang Lihui, Tao Xiong, Zeng Bairong and Hu Bo et. al. (eds). *Zhongguo jingju shi* (*The History of Jinju*). Beijing: Zhongguo Xiju Chubanshe, 1990. pp. 575-76.

Jingran to resign his military leadership. Li Jingran's mother also rebuked him and released Wang Zhuyu and Shi Zhongyu. At the time the city was under siege, and Li Jingran's troops were defeated and forced to retreat. At the critical moment, Shi Zhongyu asked for a battle assignment and caught the enemy chief with a clever stratagem, thereby saving the city. Liu San described Shi Zhongyu as an unusual character. Although she was a courtesan she had self-respect and unusual courage and was very resourceful.

Another of Liu San's plays, *A Wonderful Military Courtesan*, has the same theme. The leading lady, Liang Hongyu, was a real woman in the Song Dynasty (420-479). Her husband was a general and she was also a brave woman.⁴³ However, the events in *A Wonderful Military Courtesan* were mostly imaginary, and Liang Hongyu is depicted as a military courtesan rather than a general's wife. The author merely borrowed the name of a famous woman to strengthen his theme.

In the plays *A Triumphal Marriage*, *The Good Fortune of an Unusual Girl* and the *Hehuan tu* (*Great Happiness*), Liu San created a series of female characters who broke the bounds of traditional morals. These characters dared to think and act more idealistically than men. Liu San's scripts were enjoyed by audiences and were highly praised.⁴⁴

⁴³ Tuo Tuo. *Song shi* (*The History of the Song Dynasty*). 10 vols. Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1972, p. 11365.

Liu San's plays reflected the spirit of his times – the closing years of imperial rule, when western culture entered China and new ideological trends were emerging. It is evident from his plays that Liu San was a man of learning and a thinker. Although in financial difficulty, he persevered in his studies and developed a deep and detailed understanding of the lives of courtesans, both historically and in his own time. During this period when the new was replacing the old, many social issues, including the position of women, actors, courtesans, and the traditional moral code, became the subjects of plays. Liu San's plays were concerned with these social issues, and in particular the plight of courtesans and actors, to a greater extent than any other plays of the time.

Liu San was the first to raise the issue of the status of courtesans. He portrayed their love lives with the intention of educating audiences so that they would not despise but recognize them as human beings. In the play *A Marvelous Courtesan*, the conflict between Liu San's ideas and the traditional morals was portrayed on stage by the conflict between the army and General Li Jingran. Not only did the soldiers pressure General Li Jingran to resign, he also had to lead Shi Zhongyu's horse and carry her spear when she returned in triumph after defeating the enemy. Liu San has Shi Zhongyu ask, "Are courtesans not human beings?" Together with General Li's mother she sings, "Courtesans, too, can be heroines".⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Ma Shaobo, Zhang Lihui, Tao Xiong, Zeng Bairong and Hu Bo et. al. (eds). *Zhongguo jingju shi* (*The History of Jinju*). Beijing: Zhongguo Xiju Chubanshe, 1990, vol. 1. p. 576.

⁴⁵ Liu Liemao, Su Huanzhong and Guo Jingrui, eds. *Che Wang Fu quben jinghua*, (*The Essence of the Che Wang Fu Repertoire*). Guangzhou: Zhongshan Daxue Chubanshe, 1991-1993, vol. 2. p. 382.

Liu San's plays espoused the idea of the equality of the sexes as part of his trenchant criticism of the traditional moral codes and the status system. Under his pen, General Wang Zhuyu, Commanding General Li Jingran and courtesan Shi Zhongyu were equal in terms of human dignity, although their social positions were vastly different. Therefore, the love between Wang Zhuyu and Shi Zhongyu was sincere and equal, not based on pity or sympathy.

There were many plays focusing on courtesans in the history of Chinese *xiqu*. Some of the most famous are *Jiu fengchen* (*Saving a Courtesan*), *Du Shiniang* (*Du Shiniang*) and *Taohua shan* (*Peach-blossom Fan*). In these plays, the playwrights treated the courtesans with sympathy and respect. In *Peach-blossom Fan* courtesan Li Xiangjun was even involved in state affairs. However, Liu San was the first to advocate a respectable social status and human dignity for courtesans.

4.4 Conclusion

American scholar Chungwen Shih noted that “the medieval Western courtly love based on the hero's fervent adoration for his lady, and the idea of Platonic love based on spiritual transcendence, are both foreign to the values of the Yuan playwrights”.⁴⁶ This applies equally to the love stories of the Qing Dynasty and *jingju*. Chinese theatre never gave expression to “the hero's fervent adoration” or “the idea of Platonic love”. The central concern of the best love story plays was not the

glorification of love itself but the struggle by the lovers against the traditional moral code.

The value of love story plays of this era was that they created characters who behaved counter to the traditional Chinese moral codes. When *lixue* was the dominant ideology every aspect of the lives of young people was highly regulated. Women's lives in particular were severely circumscribed, and young people were compelled to obey their parents' or their elder brothers' instructions in relation to marriage. The combination of Buddhism and Taoism's commandments with *lixue*'s call for the "elimination of desire" exerted enormous moral pressure on young couples who were looking forward to love and marriage. Of the characters in these plays, some are passionate and frank; some fall in love with the person they choose and elope; some escape from Sramana to seek an ordinary life; and some dare to think and act with a strong defiant spirit. All of these characters and the plays as a whole express rebellion against traditional values and the traditional moral code.

These plays therefore had the effect of destabilizing the existing moral structure of society, and exerted great influence over their audiences. In the twenty-fifth year of the reign of Daoguang (1845), a Tanghuang theatrical troupe performed a *Huagu* (*Drum Dance*) eight times in the countryside of western Zhejiang Province. "Within one month six widows were remarried. Some of them had been living in widowhood for over ten years and their children had grown up. An official's daughter, who was

⁴⁶ Shih, Chung-Wen. *The Golden Age of Chinese Drama-Yuan Tsa Chu*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976, p. 71.

twenty-three years old and had not married ran away with this troupe”.⁴⁷ During that time there was a common saying: “(If the) Tanghuang *xiqu* plays ten pieces, nine out of ten widows will remarry”.⁴⁸

As compared with the plays of the Yuan and Ming Dynasties, love story plays of this era show a number of new characteristics. Firstly, the typical setting of the love story is no longer “before the flowers and under the moon”. Love is experienced in a whole range of contexts and between all kinds of people. Women are portrayed as having a significant role in society and taking the initiative in love and marriage.

Secondly, love story plays featuring religious subjects focus on the characters’ search for a new understanding of life; love story plays of this era consciously take a strongly anti-religious and anti-traditional cultural position and promote happy ordinary marriages, as in *A Son Cleaves a Mountain to Save his Mother*, *Longing for the World* and *Flirtation of a Monk and Nun*. These plays actually attack all aspects of traditional culture including Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism. They represent a kind of cultural awakening.

Thirdly, the plays about courtesans both break new ground and give a strong sense of the spirit of the times. Although playwrights had shown sympathy for courtesans

⁴⁷ Liang Gongchen. *Quanjie lu* (A Collection of Expostulation). Quoted from Pan Lizhu. *Qingdai zhongqi yandu liyuan shiliao* (Information material of Beijing Xiqu World in the Mid-Qing Dynasty). Taipei: Liren Shudian, 1998, p. 65.

⁴⁸ Liang Gongchen. *Quanjie lu* (A Collection of Expostulation). Quoted from Tan Fan. *Youling shi* (A History of Chinese Performers). Shanghai: Shanghai Wenyi Chubanshe, 1995, p. 129.

throughout the history of Chinese theatre, Liu San's stories were the first to raise the issue of the human dignity for courtesans. Liu San strongly criticised the traditional moral code and the traditional status system, but more than that, his plays advocated the new concept of equality of the sexes.

The love story plays kept pace with ideological disputes over traditional moral code and traditional culture, and the question of the doctrine of the elimination of desire. In the middle of the Qing Dynasty, the research of traditional Chinese scholars revealed that the *lixue* Confucianism of the Song-Ming era had been used by its followers to persecute people. To counterattack *lixue*, they asserted that "truth is within desire". This created favourable conditions in new developments of literary and theatrical circles for developments in thought, and the authors and works of this period all depicted the self and emotions unfettered by *lixue*. Moreover, with the new ideological trends and social reforms of the late Qing Dynasty, social problems became the focus of many playwrights' concerns. Thus, love story plays responded to the ideological and literary development of the times and reflected the fact that traditional religion and ideology had lost their influence over the minds of the people. Those reading these love story plays and the songs and narrative poems on the same subjects in the *Che Wang Fu* Repertoire today will be struck by their similarity to Boccaccio's *The Decameron*.

Chapter Five

The Rise of the History Play and the Spirit of the Era

5.0 Introduction

Every type of theatre has its strengths and weaknesses. The developmental process of each theatre type is ultimately a process of unceasingly seeking for the competitive edge. The early Anhui theatre troupe had plays of distinctive regional characteristics, and later produced many comedies, *xiao ju* or laughing plays and love story plays during its development. However, this was not the greatest competitive edge for the Anhui troupes. Apart from the fact that Anhui troupes possessed the fundamentals of acrobatics, majestic music, plays with historical subjects were its true competitive edge.

Since the Daoguang period, there was a change in the general mood of *xiqu*. It changed from the love story play in the Qianlong and Jiaqing period to the history play. Consequently, it changed the aesthetic standards of theatre and led to the popularity of the history play. This allowed the Anhui troupes to gradually appear on stage with a new look and to develop from a regional theatre in the early years, to the largest theatre type in modern times: *jingju*.

The popularity of *jingju*'s history plays during the late-Qing Dynasty cannot be described using the ordinary sense of popularity. Its popularity represented an

overcoming of the laws of the Ming and Qing Dynasties, which “forbade actors from taking the roles of emperors, empresses, sages, loyal official and martyrs of successive dynasties”.¹

In traditional monarchical society, it was impossible for history not to be related to Emperors, Empresses, loyal officials and martyrs. The official historical records were therefore written surrounding these figures. The prohibition of staging these historical figures had no doubt restricted the development of history plays and led to an imbalance in the content of Ming *chuanqi* plays, hence the phrase “nine out of ten *chuanqi* plays were love stories”. Amongst the few history plays of the Ming Dynasty, most of the characters and plots were fictitious even though they were under the name of history. This caused history plays to have unclear boundaries. Moreover, there is also no known research relating to the theoretical aspects of the history plays during the Ming Dynasty.

However, there were many loyal official and martyrs in the Chinese history, and the law did not list which historical loyal official and martyrs were prohibited from appearing on stage. In strict compliance with the law, only corrupted and treacherous court officials were allowed to be on stage. Consequently, the law was unable to be executed comprehensively and strictly even in the Ming Dynasty. There were also some Ming *chuanqi* plays that are based on true historical figures and events, but historical events were always mixed with love story, and some loyal official plays

¹ Wang Xiaochuan. *Yuan Ming Qing sandai jinhui xiaoshuo xiqu shiliao* (*The Historical Information of the Banned and Destroyed Novels and Plays during the Yuan, Ming and Qing Dynasties*). Taipei:

used the form of the courtroom play. In addition, though there were also some plays that involved emperors, their presence was often symbolized by the appearance of an eunuch that was ordered to read out the imperial edict.

The law that restricted the development of history plays was finally broken. The history play developed from a combination of the love story play with the history play to the purely history play, from a single episode of history to a large-scale theatrical series, from a particular breakthrough to completely overcoming the law.

The aim of this chapter is to explore the social reasons behind the rise of history plays and the overcoming of the law, and the spirit of the era it reflected. This chapter is divided into three parts. In the first part, I will simply introduce the two different categories of history play: history play and historical fiction play. In part two, I will discuss social reasons behind the rise of history plays and the overcoming of the law. The third part will focus on analyzing the content of plays. The focus of discussion centers on the spirit of the era embodied in *jingju*'s history plays.

5.1 History play and Historical fiction play

History plays in *jingju* can be divided into two types. One is the history play, and the other is historical fiction play, which is fiction based on history. History plays emphasized factual loyalty to historical events. They were based on historical

Heluo Tushu Chubanshe, 1980, p. 10 and p.16.

records of the relationships between characters, and the plots copied real historical events. This type of play enabled audiences to gain knowledge of history, as well as satisfying their desire for art and entertainment.

The content of the historical fiction play is a special type of history play. It also drew their subjects from historical documents, but most of the subjects were taken from folk historical stories.² These plays contained greater elements of fabrication and imagination. They usually emphasized the truth of emotions, rather than the truth in historical facts and details. In the reign of Qianlong, a scholar, Li Diaoyuan, wrote a book named *Ju hua* (*Talks on Theatre*), which attempts to explore the theories of this area. He states, "I worry that the audience will only look on the plays as 'plays' and not knowing of the historical events behind them, will doubt their [historicity], therefore I have written *Talks on Theatre* in order to show their historicity; but also because I worry that people will only look on the plays as play but because of the historical events behind them, believe in their historicity, therefore I have written *Talks on Theatre* to show their fictional nature."³ Li Diaoyuan's opinion can help us to understand the relationship between fiction and reality. On the whole, the value of the historical data of historical fiction play is considered to be inferior to those of history play. However, some of the outstanding works of historical fiction play embraced important contemporary themes and revealed contemporary ideology and the playwright's ideology. The playwrights hoped that audiences would, through

² For example, *Yangjia jiang xi* (*Plays of the Yang Family Generals*) and *Bao Zheng plays* etc, they all belong to historical fiction play.

³ Li Diaoyuan. *Juhua* (*Talks on Theatre- Preface*). In ZGXLJ. vol. 8. p. 35.

their plays, carefully think about history, society and life, rather than to investigate the authenticity of each event.

5.2 The Rise of the History plays and Overcoming of the Law

The rise of the history play and overcoming of the law had social reasons. Since the Ming Dynasty, the history play experienced a process of gradual changes. By the late Qing, the special social background offered a favourable condition for the development of history play, which enabled *jingju* playwrights to fully overcome the law, thus promoting *xiqu* to an important role in people's lives.

5.2.1 Overcoming of the Law

In the early-Qing, Hong Sheng (1645-1704) was the first playwright to bring emperor and empresses onto stage. The main characters of his play *Changsheng dian* (*Palace of Eternal Life*) was Emperor Xuanzong of the Tang Dynasty and his concubine Yang Yühuan. The performance of the *Palace of Eternal Life* not only brought emperors and empresses of past dynasties on to the stage, it also violated the prohibition of theatrical performance during "national mourning" periods. Since Emperor Kangxi admired the play, the Qing government did not prosecute Hong

Sheng with two crimes altogether, but he was still stripped of his rights to enter the imperial examination and thus stopped him from pursuing an official career.⁴

Following Hong Sheng's incident was *Taohua shan* (*The Peach Blossom Fan*) by Kong Shangren (1648-1718). The play also brought the emperor and loyal subjects of the late Ming onto the stage. It sought to reveal the lesson behind the collapse of the Ming Dynasty. *The Peach Blossom Fan* was written in 1699, together with *Palace of Eternal Life*, they became the two outstanding plays in the theatrical circle at the time. Unfortunately, Kong Shangren, the sixty-fourth generation descendent of Confucius and an official of imperial court, was soon dismissed from his official post.

"The Hong Sheng and Kong Shangren incident" was no doubt an attack on the creation of *chuanqi* plays. Followed by the reform of the *xiqu* administration system and the abolition of private theatrical troupes, a declining trend began to emerge for the creation of *chuanqi*, and subsequently brought about the decline of elegant *kunqu*. Under such circumstance, the imperial playwrights sanctioned by the Qing government were adaptations of some large-scale popular novels. The adaptation of these large-scale popular novels helped to resolve the crisis in imperial play writing.

⁴ The crime of Hong Sheng was to perform during a period of imperial mourning.

It was in the adaptation of these novels that the imperial playwrights had in fact brought the emperors, empresses and loyal officials on to the stage. For example, the novel *Fengshen Bang (Investitures of the Gods)* involved emperors, empresses and loyal officials of the remote antiquity dynasties of the Shang and Zhou. *Sanguo yanyi (The Romance of the Three Kingdoms)* also involved Guan Yu who was a god and sage for the Manchu. These examples show that the Qing law described above was more lenient towards official court art than to popular art.

However, adaptations also reflected a new trend: that imperial plays could be adapted from popular novels. While being satisfied with entertainment and praising the peaceful heyday, these plays could also be regarded as historical lessons for the administration. Unfortunately, these plays were only confined to the imperial court, and the Qing government strictly prohibited the access of these imperial plays by ordinary people.

The need for outstanding actors from different regions to collaborate in a series of large-scale performances not only nurtured the actors but also provided conditions for the rise of the history play and to overcome the law. In fact, the regional theatre began, in the mid-Qing, to follow the example set by the court, thus leading to the emergence of some history plays and banning plays. But inspection and ban of plays was still very strict during the mid-Qing. Jiao Xun, a scholar of the mid-Qing, stated in his *Ju hua (A Discussion of Theatre)*, “The law clearly stated that theatrical performers should never act as emperors and sage.” He once saw that the head of a

theatrical troupe was arrested and heavily punished when his troupe violated the prohibitions.⁵

The prohibition became lax after the 1820s. According to *Daoguang sinian qingshengban jumu* (*Qingsheng Troupe's List of xiqu in 1824*), there were some plays involving emperors and empresses in this list of *xiqu*.⁶ Thereafter, more and more history plays involving emperors, empresses and loyal subjects appeared on stage. In the *jingju* plays of the late-Qing, most emperors of the past dynasties were brought onto stage, including the founding emperor of the Qin Dynasty - Ying Zheng, the first emperor of the Han - Liu Bang, the Tang emperor - Li Shimin, the founding emperor of the Song - Zhao Kuanyin and the first emperor of the Ming - Zhu Yuanzhang,⁷ who were the most representative figures in Chinese history. Accompanying these emperors were the empresses and loyal subjects of the past dynasties. These historical figures had also been prohibited to be acted on stage by the laws of the Ming and Qing Dynasties. Their appearance on stage indicated a lax trend in the law towards the theatrical circle.

5.2.2 The Background of the Late Qing

⁵ Wang Xiaochuan. *Yuan Ming Qing sandai jinhui xiaoshuo xiqu shiliao* (*The Historical Information of the Banned and Destroyed Novels and Plays during the Yuan, Ming and Qing Dynasties*). Taipei: Heluo Tushu Chubanshe, 1980. p. 293

⁶ See *Daoguang sinian qingshengban jumu* (*Qingsheng Troupe's List of xiqu in the reign of 4th Years of Daoguang*). In Zhou Mingtai. *Daoxian yilia liyuan xinian xiaolu* (*Theatrical Information from the Reigns of Daoguan and Xianfeng onwards*). Shanghai: 1932. In *Jiliju xiqu congshu* (*The Series of Xiqu from Jiliju*), Category no. 3. pp. 4-6

⁷ See Guo Jingrui and Chen Weiwu *Che Wang Fu quben tiyao* (*Summary of the Che Wang Fu Repertoire*). Guangzhou: Zhongshan Daxue Chubanshe, 1989.

The laxness of the law was closely related to the special background of the late-Qing. The year 1840 was an important time in the history of China. In that year, there was a watershed event in Chinese history, the Sino-British Opium War that shocked the country. Following that was the war between China and the allied forces of England and France in 1856, and then was the Sino-French war in 1884, and the Sino-Japanese war in 1894. Accompanying these military defeats, the Chinese were forced to pay indemnities and to sign treaties. These to the Qing government were unprecedented “disasters” and “humiliations”. When conflicts and wars became reality and were increasingly more serious, spiritual and moral crisis became the characteristics of this period, though the Qing government officials at the time might have believed that the Westerners only had more advanced scientific technology, while the Chinese had excellent spiritual civilization and political structure.

Confronted by more advanced technologies, an important issue for the late-Qing was whether China should resist or embrace Western science and technology. During the reign of Daoguang, Wei Yuan (1794 - 1857) was the first to suggest “learning Westerner’s scientific technology”. Feng Guifen (1809-1874) proposed “to run China based on its traditional moral codes, but supplement it with the technologies from various powerful nations.”⁸ Confronted with the deteriorating situation of the country, the Qing Emperors desperately sought counter-measures to extricate the nation from further crisis. Therefore, this led to the *yangwu yundong* (‘Westernization Movement’) that occurred from 1860s to 1890s.

The “Westernization Movement” led to great consequences throughout China. Within the Qing court, the traditionalist called the “Westernization Movement” “throwing away the cardinal principle” and thus forcefully argued, “A country is built upon morality, not technologies”.⁹ Although the traditionalist’s arguments were sharp and fiercely worded given the circumstance at that time, it might seem to be unrealistic empty talk. The traditionalist emphasized morality and etiquette, and ignored the development of industries. The reformists and traditionalist therefore engaged in a fierce debate. Willingly or unwillingly, Chinese culture began to extricate itself from behind closed doors. This agonizing yet hopeful development was first reflected in the establishment of modern industries, transportation development, the expansion industries and commerce in coastal cities and even in rural economics.

However, the “Westernization Movement” that lasted for almost half a century still could not change the “fate” of the Qing government. The sweet dream of “making the country rich and a military power” was quickly destroyed by China’s defeat in the Sino-Japanese war of 1894. As a defeated country, China had no other choice but to sign more treaties with the victorious nations. Defeats in wars and compensation payments aggravated domestic pressures, on top of the increasing of population pressure. During the late Ming and early-Qing, the Chinese population sharply

⁸ See Meng Fanhua. *Zhongshen kuanghuan (Revelry of All Gods)*. Beijing: Jinri Zhongguo Chubanshe, 1997, p. 244.

⁹ Feng Tianyu, He Xiaoming and Zhou Jiming. *Zhongguo wenhuashi (The History of Chinese Culture)*. Shanghai: Shanghai Renming Chubanshe, 1994, p. 971.

declined due to wars. In the reign of Emperor Kangxi, the emperor once adopted a policy to increase the fertility rate. Consequently, the population soared, and the following table summarizes situations at the time.

TABLE 4: THE POPULATION OF CHINA DURING THE QING DYNASTY¹⁰

Year	Population Number
18th year of the reign of Emperor Shunzhi (1662)	21,060,000
56th year of the reign of Emperor Kangxi (1717)	24,620,000
6th year of the reign of Emperor Qianlong (1741)	143,410,000
57th year of the reign of Emperor Qianlong (1792)	307,460,000
6th year of the reign of Emperor Jiaqing (1810)	298,500,000
1st year of the reign of Emperor Daoguang (1821)	355,540,000
21st year of the reign of Emperor Daoguang (1841)	413,450,000

From 1741 to 1841, the Chinese population increased three fold. However, land area and food production rates were far from being in direct proportion to the fertility rate. As an agricultural nation, the lack of food had to be replenished by importation. Because the early Qing policy of “never to increase land taxes” continued to apply throughout the entire Qing Dynasty, military budgets during war times and any compensation paid to victorious nations mostly came from commercial taxes. However, it was far from enough.

In order to resolve the lack of financial income, there was a rise in the practice of selling official posts and noble titles to the wealthy. Government officials took advantage of the situation by engaging in bribery, causing an overflow of corruption that led to the extreme poverty of the people. However, court officials tried to

conceal the truth. Such malpractice further led people to lose their trust of the government, which ultimately led to the rise of the Taiping rebellion and a series of other peasant uprisings. This “internal crisis” began in 1850 and ended in 1873, lasting for twenty-three years.

Seeing China’s numerous setbacks in wars and diplomacy and the many national crises, men of vision finally realized from this situation that simply learning the strengths of Western technology was far from enough, and that to embrace the Western political system was a constructive solution. The importation of Western knowledge thus came to be a central issue. Within the proposition of learning the Western political system, two schools of thought arose. One school was the reformist led by Kang Youwei, the other school was the revolutionist represented by Sun Yat-sen. Although there were differences of opinions in issues of monarchy system and imperial power, the former wanted to retain the monarch, while the latter wished to overthrow the monarchy. Whether it was the reformist or the revolutionist, they all imply a challenge to the sacredness of the traditional culture and imperial power.

It was under such circumstances that *jingju*’s history plays developed its popularity. This was a special period in Chinese history. Firstly, the rapid decline of a prosperous nation created a need to find an ideological prop in past history and traditional culture for a theoretical explanation. Following that was the rapid development of social circumstances that led to a continuous renewal of concepts in

¹⁰ Gu Hongting. *Zhongguo jindai shi (A Modern History of China)*. Taipei: Sanmin Shuju, 1994, pp. 71-72.

the ideological circle. On the one hand were the traditionalists who strongly upheld traditional culture, moral codes and the monarchy system. On the other hand, supporters of the “Western Movement”, reformists and revolutionists, needed to look for evidence in historical culture to justify social reform. Consequently, all of these constructed a complex situation for the interpretation of history at the time. Whether to believe in history, to worship history, suspect history, deny history or to fabricate history, became hot issues at the time. The influence of the debate also had an impact on the theatrical world, which not only created a suitable and timely atmosphere for the rise of *jingju*’s history play, but it also provided themes for playwrights to explore.

The development of the domestic situation during the late-Qing was not simply the issue of the decline of an empire, but a matter of the reform of a two thousand years old monarchy. It was with such background that vague representations of historical events and figures could not assist in clarifying the issue, and thus representative historical characters were brought on to stage. Though the law was confronted by a challenge, the Qing government had no choice but to soften its strict prohibition. In 1872, 1874, 1885, 1890, 1900 and 1905, the Qing government repeatedly examined the prohibitions and law relating to *xiqu* implemented since the early-Qing. In 1900, the Qing government abolished the legal prohibition that banned women from entering theatre, which implemented in the reign of Emperor Qianlong. In 1905, the Qing government again allowed Manchu to enter theatre. Though the government still did not abolish the prohibition that “emperors, sage and loyal officials were not

allow to be brought on to stage” until the end of the Qing, their lack of power coupled with the opening of the society meant that the prohibition could not be strictly enforced. The history plays of *jingju* are flourishing under this background and show the characters as below.

5.3 Critique of Chinese Tradition and the Era of Change

The late-Qing history plays stimulated people to think about traditional culture by spreading historical knowledge. Playwrights not only exposed the weaknesses of *lixue* moral codes, they also expressed criticisms and challenges against the imperial system. Ideas of restricting imperial powers and “equality” raised by playwrights were also reflected in the popularity of the new *ma chao xi* (plays abusing emperor) and *da chao xi* (plays about making trouble in court).

This idea of “equality” was applied to Guan Yu. During the late-Qing, playwright Wang Hongshou removed the sacredness of Guan Yu and return to him his true human nature as a historical figure. This further demonstrated the new spirit of the era in the choice between human power and supernatural power.

5.3.1 Historical Experience and Lesson

As mentioned above, history plays in *jingju* can be divided into two types. One is the history play, and the other is the historical fictitious play. For the history play,

authenticity is an important factor. Only the truth can give people historical knowledge. In a certain sense, history plays of the late Qing were historical review. Playwrights adopted a highly truthful method of writing plays concerning the history before the Han Dynasty, where Chinese culture originated and which was viewed as the classical culture. The contribution made by *jingju* playwrights was to use the creative and vivid form of *xiqu* in reliving the information contained in the difficult classical historical documents and to offer historical experiences and historical lessons to the audience. *Fujing qingzui* (*Offer a Humble Apology*) belongs to this type.

Offer a Humble Apology is set in the Dongzhou Dynasty (770 B.C.-221 B.C.), when was a period of dukedoms and separatist warlord regimes. It deals with the story of the King of Zhao who had obtained a rare treasure, Heshi Jade, which the King of Qin coveted. The King of Qin sent an emissary to Zhao, wishing to exchange fifteen cities for the jade. The King of Zhao knew this was a conspiracy, but did not dare to offend the stronger Qin king. He ordered Lian Xiangru, a scholar, to take the jade to the Qin king. After the Qin king received the jade, he had no intention of giving away his cities. Lian Xiangru tricked the king by saying, "The jade has certain impurities. I will polish it for you." When Lian Xiangru got back the jade, he immediately sent it back to Zhao. The Qin king was so furious that he wanted to kill Lian Xiangru. However, Xiangru's persuasive argument about justice allowed the Qin king no other alternatives but to farewell him with a big feast. When Lian Xiangru returned to Zhao, he was appointed a minister.

The Qin king, however, did not willingly give up. He invited the Zhao king to Qin to meet him in the city of Mianchi. During the meeting, the Qin king invited the Zhao king to play a song on *qin* (Chinese zither). After the song, the Qin king ordered the official historian to record this event in the annals, that on a certain year, certain month and certain day, the Zhao king played a song on zither to entertain the Qin king, hoping to insult the Zhao state. Lian Xiangru then invited the Qin king to play and had this recorded in the annals. The Qin king knew that Zhao had prepared an ambush nearby, so he dared not to act rashly.

After the meeting at the Mianchi, Lian Xiangru was promoted to the Premier, but the Chief Commander Lian Po refused to accept him. Lian Xiangru sent an invitation to Lian Po to come and discuss ways of dealing with the Qin troops. Lian Po tore up the invitation. Later he heard that Lian Xiangru had forced the Qin to retreat. Lian Po thought that Lian Xiangru had used his name and reputation to do so, so he was very angry. Lian Xiangru's family members came to conciliate but Lian Po refused to see them. One day, as Lian Po was riding his horse down a street, he saw Lian Xingru's sedan. Lian Xiangru told his servants to go into a small alley in order to give way to Lian Po. Lian Po thought that Xiangru was afraid of him, so he sent a messenger to find out more. Lian Xiangru told the messenger, "I am not even afraid of the powerful Qin king, why would I be afraid of Lian Po? If Zhao's Premier and the Chief Commander unite as one, this will give cause for Qin to be afraid of Zhao."

Lian Po was deeply moved and as an apology, he carried a birch cane to Lian Xiangru's mansion and asked for a flogging.

The author of *Offer a Humble Apology* was Wang Xiaonong (1858-1918), a Manchu. Wang, born in an official family, was clever and eager to learn at a young age. He became a *juren* (approved imperial examination entrants) after passing the county and provincial level examinations at the age of twenty-two. However, Wang Xiaonong did not want to seek a scholarly honour. He loved *xiqu* very much and always watched the performances of Sanqing troupe. Since he had no intention of seeking official post through the imperial examination, his father bought an official post, being the Head of Taikang County in Hennan province, for him. Soon afterwards he was dismissed from office because he offended high officials and noble lords. After that, he joined theatrical circle and became a well-known actor and playwright.

Wang Xiaonong has written more than forty plays in his life, and *Offer a Humble Apology* was one of them. The play drew its material from the Han historian, Sima Qian's *Shiji (Record of History)*. The events and characters in the play all followed strictly with historical facts. As a play that is written in accordance with historical facts, *Offer a Humble Apology* is also a play that is full of spirits of the era. During the late-Qing, under the autocratic ruling of Empress Dowager Cixi, social reform was faced with great obstacles and difficulties. In adversity, Emperor Guangxu advocated that civil and military officials should unit as one. *Offer a Humble*

Apology was produced under this background and it was also named *Jiang xiang he* (*General and Premier United as One*). In the play, the author demonstrated Lian Xiangru's intelligence and courage when confronted with a powerful enemy, and his modesty when faced with Lian Po. It also displayed Lian Po's virtue in his ability to correct his own shortcomings. The play revealed to us the historical lesson that only sincere unity could extricate a country from adversity and grew from weak to strong. At the same time, it also showed that the author yearned for outstanding in foreign affair and military talents at a time when the Qing government suffered numerous diplomatic and military setbacks.

Most of the history plays in the late Qing are pregnant with meaning. For example, *Jue ying hui* (*Taking off Hats in Celebration*) allowed people to see that treating your troops with kindness was an essential element to victory. *Xi fenghou* (*Appointing as Marquis*) praised the founding emperor of Han, Liu Bang, who was happy to accept advice. *Mian shan* (*Mountain Mian*) demonstrated that rulers often share their hardships with their subordinates but not necessarily their happiness. These plays all drew their materials from official history books. In reliving the different historic figures and events, these plays provide audiences with experiences and lessons behind the historical events, or to inform audiences of the moral standards that ancient people lived by, or to teach people the moral laws of life. At the same time, they have also reveal the strong passion of the playwrights, and demonstrate another character as below.

5.3.2 Criticisms of Traditional Moral Codes and the Monarch

The traditional moral code has been linked to the fundamental principle of the monarchy system. This fundamental principle originated from Confucianism and *lixue*. Confucianism initiated *san gang* (three morals or disciplines): the subjects must obey the monarch; a son must obey his father; a wife must obey her husband. Under these disciplines, society was organized into a strict hierarchical system under the Emperor. As the hierarchical system gradually declined, upholders of *lixue* took the three disciplines to the extreme in order to maintain this crumbling hierarchical structure. “For subordinates, Emperors must always be right; for children, parents will never be wrong”. “If the Emperor desired the death of his subordinate, the subordinate’s refusal of death displayed his disloyalty; if the father demands the death of his son, objection is contrary to filial piety.” Confucius’ moral principles were developed into totalitarianism.

Along with the criticism of totalitarianism of *lixue* moral codes and the strength of imperial power, thinkers of the late Ming and the early Qing had vigorously criticized the autocratic monarchy. In the late-Qing, thinking about the traditional culture became a fundamental element of social reform. This was also reflected in the theatrical circle. To reveal the weaknesses of hierarchy and traditional moral codes became another characteristic of history plays of *jingju*. This is demonstrated in *Dingsheng chunqiu* (*In a Prime of Manhood*), *Jindian zhuangfeng* (*Pretending to be Insane at the Palace*) and *Zhan huangpao* (*Slashing the Imperial Robe*) and so on.

In a Prime of Manhood is also set in the Dongzhou Dynasty (770 B.C. - 221 B.C). It begins when King Chu Ping made a marriage engagement for his son with the daughter of the King Qin. But when King Chu Ping saw the princess, he made her one of his own concubines because she was very beautiful. His son was furious, but he did not dare to express his anger to his father. Wu She, an old General, forcefully argued with King Chu Ping, and hoped to change his mind. Wu She's action angered King Chu Ping who threw him into prison. King Chu Ping knew that Wu She's two sons, Wu Shang and Wu Yuan, were extraordinarily brave and powerful, and would probably seek to avenge their father. He ordered Wu She to write a letter to Fan city to ask his sons to come to the Capital. When Wu Shang received the letter, he realised that he and his brother would be put to death by the King, so he advised Wu Yuan to escape while he would go and see King Chu Ping. When Wu Shang arrived at the Capital, his whole family, a total of a few hundred people, were put to death. Meanwhile, during Wu Yuan's escape, he was helped by a fisherman and a washing girl, who lost their lives for him. Twenty years later, Wu Yuan was able to raise an army to seek vengeance for his family.

The events of *In a Prime of Manhood* came from the Han historian, Sima Qian's *Record of History: Wu Zixu liezhuan (Biography of Wu Zixu)*.¹¹ About the subject of Wu Yuan had appeared on novel and *xiqu* for the past one thousand years or so. During the Qianlong period of the Qing Dynasty, there had been play of same

¹¹ Sima Qian. *Shiji (Record of History)*. 10 vols. Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1982, pp. 2439-52.

subject in Imperial Court *xiqu*. The *jingju* play - *In a Prime of Manhood*, was written on this basis and revealed its unique theme.

In the play, Wu Shang was a character restrained by traditional moral codes, and he agonizingly struggled under the hierarchical concept of “Emperor and his subjects”. Even though he knew that King Chu Ping was a fatuous and self-indulgent ruler, yet Wu Shang still decided to go to the Capital. The character of Wu Shang was portrayed as perfect and lofty by the playwright. The more perfect Wu Shang’s personality, the more likely he would be executed. When the playwright depicted the destruction of a perfect and lofty nature, it allowed people to see that the idea “if Emperor desired for the death of his subordinate, the subordinate’s refusal to die reveal his disloyalty” was very cruel.

The leading role of *In a Prime of Manhood* was Wu Yuan. The play strives to highlight the rebellious personality of Wu Yuan, and his unyielding spirit in seeking revenge. On his escape route, in order to break through Zhaoguan Gate, Wu Yuan’s hair and beard turned white in one night. Consequently, the gatekeepers and soldiers were unable to recognize him. During his twenty years on the run, Wu Yuan endured humiliation in order to carry out his important mission. When he borrowed troops to seek revenge, and conquered Zhaoguan Gate, King Chu Ping heard of this new and died of fright instantly. An eye for an eye, the image of Wu Yuan was a bold challenge to *lixue*’s moral code.

The current significance of the play was to stimulate people to think. The family of Wu She consisted of hundreds of people, while the death of the whole family occurred on the eve of the monarchy system, but this brutality always existed throughout the traditional monarchical society. In Chinese history, the Prime Minister of Qin, Li Si, was executed along with his nine lineages, and three lineages of Han General - Han Xin were also beheaded. The so-called three lineages referred to one's father's family, mother's family and wife's family. The nine lineages included every one who had any blood relation to the party concerned. In the hierarchical society, it was normally that when one person committed a crime, his whole lineage would be executed or reduced to musical households or official prostitutes. In the late-Qing, the Qing government continued to promote "excellent Chinese morals and political structure". It was in reliving the historical events that the playwrights let people to think about whether this policy was good, and whether the morals that supported these policies were good morals. This kind of thinking was further revealed in *pretending to be Insane at the Palace*.

Pretending to be Insane at the Palace is another example of the challenge to traditional moral code and imperial power. The play describes a story about Emperor Qin Ershi (209 B.C.-207 B.C.) who visited Prime Minister Zhao Gao's mansion. Zhao Gao's beautiful daughter was at home after her husband died recently. Qin Ershi saw her and ordered Zhao Gao to send her to the palace next morning. The daughter was furious and pretended to be insane. She let her hair down, threw away her shoes, and tore her dress. Then she pulled her father's beard, addressed and

caressed him as if he were her husband, and finally declared that she had been summoned by the gods to ascend to Heaven. Zhao Gao reported to the Emperor that his daughter had suddenly become insane. It was not so easy to make the lascivious tyrant to give her up. She must prove that she was really insane. So, when she came to the imperial court with her father, she called herself the daughter of Heaven, called her father as her darling son, and called Qin Ershi as brother emperor at one time and base tyrant at another. She screamed out all the wrongdoings of the emperor and his father. The dissimulation was so successful that finally she was sent home.

In this play, Emperor Qin Ershi bears the image of “an autocrat and a traitor to the people”. He disregarded the emotion of Zhao Gao’s daughter, and thought that to become an imperial concubine must be every woman’s greatest desire. “All the people of a country are the subordinates of the emperor, all the lands of the nation are the land of the emperor.” No one would dare to disobey the emperor. However, Zhao Gao’s daughter not only dared to disobey the emperor’s order, she even had the courage to abuse the emperor. The feature of the play is “pretending to be insane”, which had vividly exposed the innermost emotions of the daughter of Zhao. These emotions were in fact feeling of the playwright. Under the strict hierarchical structure that “subjects must obey the monarch and sons must obey his father”, the daughter of Zhao Gao had reversed this “sacred” relationship.

Qin Ershi and Zhao Gao are real historical figures. The former is a fatuous and self-indulgent emperor, while the latter is a treacherous court official. The two of them are notorious. One should note that even though Zhao Gao has worked as a Prime

Minister, he is originally an eunuch and does not have daughters. Though the plot of the play was pure fabrication, it has truthfully relived the hideous features of these fatuous emperors and treacherous court officials, and thus exposes the shortcomings of the monarch system.

There were so many plays that condemned the abuse of powers by emperors that a genre was created called *Ma chao xi* and *da chao xi*, with plays such as *Hei Dachao* (*Black-faced General Abuses the Court*), *Li Gang fanchao* (*Li Gang Abuses the Court*) and so on. When all of these plays come together to form a genre they, not only revealed the weaknesses of monarchy, but also further developed the theme of anti-tyranny.

Most of the *ma chao xi* and *da hao xi* belong to the historical fiction play genre. Intertwining historical facts and fabrication, playwrights sought to express their strong sentiments and aspiration. Subjects of this type were unknown in the works of earlier writers: they were the new products of the late-Qing playwrights.

Of the *ma chao xi* and *da chao xi*, *Slashing the Imperial Robe* is the outstanding work. The play tells the story of the founding Song emperor Zhao Kuangyin (927-976). Han Long sent his sister, Han Sumei, to the Imperial palace as Zhao Kuangyin's concubine. As the emperor's brother-in-law, Han Long was appointed to a high-ranking official position. Old General Zheng En, sworn brother of Zhao Kuangyin, saw Han Long perpetrating outrages with the help of his sister, and driven beyond forbearance, he beat Han Long up. Han Long fled in panic to the Emperor

Zhao Kuangyin who became so angry that he sentenced Zheng En to death, appointing Han Long as the executor. Zheng En's death enraged his wife Tao Sanchun, who led her troops to encircle the Capital City. She berated the Emperor, calling him *hunjun*, a fatuous and self-indulgent ruler. Emperor Zhao Kuangyin was forced to go down on his knees to beg the Minister Gao Huaide to save him. Gao Huaide acted as a mediator, but Tao Sanchun still refused to retreat. Emperor Zhao Kuangyin promised a grand, state mourning ceremony for Zheng En. In addition, he gave Tao Sanchun his Imperial Robe as a symbol of himself.¹² Tao Sanchun slashed the Imperial Robe into pieces, symbolically beheading the Emperor.

Tao Sanchun has an independent personality. She boldly announced to Emperor Zhao Kuangyin, "I am not your government official now, thus I am not controlled by you. I do not want to get an official's salary, so I am not afraid."¹³ This kind of personality is a daring challenge to *lixue* and the hierarchy. We are unable to verify the historical factuality of whether Emperor Zhao Kuangyin kneeled down to beg help from his subordinate, since this plot was not recorded in history. As a historical fiction play, the playwright was possible to express the intensely important theme that "the Emperor also should be beheaded for his wrongdoings", by Tao Sanchun's songs.¹⁴ This idea was profoundly new and shocking in that traditional imperial society.

¹² The imperial robe is a symbol of imperial power. In the traditional Chinese culture, slashing the imperial robe means a serious punishment to the emperor.

¹³ Liu Liemao, Su Huanzhong and Guo Jingrui, eds. *Che Wang Fu quben jinghua*, (*The Essence of the Che Wang Fu Repertoire*). Guangzhou: Zhongshan Daxue Chubanshe, 1991-1993, vol. 2. p. 249.

Throughout the thousands of years of Chinese imperial history, the Emperor was always considered Heaven's son. For that reason, the only one who could punish him was Heaven himself. Peculiar natural phenomenon occurring in the sky or on land or in the sea were warning signs of Heaven to the Emperor. If the Emperor ignores these warnings and still commits all kinds of outrages, Heaven will arrange other people to take over his position, leading to the change of dynasties. However, this theory only explains the reason for dynastic changes. There was no provision for Emperors to be punished for crime he committed during his rule. *Slashing the Imperial Robe* was the first play to deal with this issue, which hinted at the idea of *deng gui jian* or "equality".¹⁵

5.3.3 The Deification of Historical Figures and Removal of the Superhuman

The concept of *deng gui jian* or "equality" was an ideal sought by the popular literature and arts for the past several centuries, and it was reflected in the character of Guan Yu in the plays of the Three Kingdoms.

The Three Kingdoms Play and Guan Yu

During the reign of Emperor Daoguang, the most popular history play was *Sanguo xi* (*Xiqu Series of the Three Kingdoms*), which was written by Lu Shengkui (1822-1889), a *jingju* actor and playwright. Lu Shengkui was born into an official family,

¹⁴ Ibid. P. 250.

and he had great interests in *xiqu* since a young age. After he failed the imperial examination, he decided to stay in Beijing and later joined the Sanqing Troupe of the Anhui Company. He concealed his real name and used Lu Shengkui as his pen name. Ever since Lu's plays made a great sensation in Beijing, he acquired the nickname of Lu Taizi meaning "Stage Lu", which indicated the importance of his plays on stage. "At times, even the performance of just the *Xiqu Series of the Three Kingdoms*, written by Lu Shengkui, alone could last for as long as half year and still with no empty seats."¹⁶ The success achieved by *Xiqu Series of the Three Kingdoms* was unprecedented, which gave rise to the "fad of the *Three Kingdoms*".

In the history of Chinese literature, the novel *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* was an outstanding work. It was the vivid military depiction that interested the Manchu, which stimulated them to translate this novel into Manchu and used it as a military reference before they broke through the Great Wall.¹⁷ Guan Yu, a character in the novel, became the god of the Manchu and the Mongols. Subsequently, when performances held in the imperial palace involved the character of Guan Yu, emperors must always lead the audience in standing up to pay respect to "Guan Yu".¹⁸ But plays involving Guan Yu were banned from performance outside the

¹⁵ For further explanation of the concept of *deng gui jian* or "equality", please see the end of Chapter one: Introduction.

¹⁶ Xu Muiyun. *Zhongguo xiqu shi* (*A History of Chinese Theatre*). Taipei: Heluo Tushu Chubanshe, 1977, P. 122.

¹⁷ See Luo Guanzhong. *Sanguo zhi* (*The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*). Li Zhuowu review. Manchou Edition of I lan-gurun-bithe. San Francisco: A limited edition reprint by Chinese Materials Centre, Inc, 1979.

¹⁸ Ye Tao. *Zhongguo jingju xisu* (*Customs of Jingju*). Xian: Shaanxi Renming Chubanshe, 1994, p. 194.

imperial palace by Emperor Yongzheng in 1725.¹⁹ Thus, in the following two hundreds years, Guan Yu disappeared from the stage outside the imperial palace.

The reason that Guan Yu became the god for the Manchu and the Mongols was closely related to the novel *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. He treated loyalty with utmost respect. During the Three Kingdoms period, China was divided into the three states of Wei, Shu and Wu. The ruler of Wei was Cao Cao, the head of Shu kingdom was Liu Bei, while Sun Quan governed the kingdom of Wu. Guan Yu and Zhang Fei were the sworn brothers of Liu Bei. In a cruel battle, Guan Yu and Liu Bei lost contact with each other. Cao Cao wanted to recruit Guan Yu and grant him the title of Hanshou Marquis and a large sum of gold. However, Guan Yu did not follow Cao Cao, but protected Liu Bei's family and helped them to find Liu Bei.

Guan Yu's loyalty to Liu Bei was admired by the Manchu and he became an object of worship. When the Manchu first ruled China, in order to strengthen their political powers, Emperor Shunzhi became sworn brothers with the leader of the Mongols. They hoped that their relationship would be as invincible as that between Guan Yu and Liu Bei.²⁰ Out of political necessity, Guan Yu became a god of the Manchu and the Mongols.

¹⁹ Wang Xiaochuan. *Yuan Ming Qing sandai jinhui xiaoshuo xiqu shiliao* (*The Historical Information of the Banned and Destroyed Novels and Plays during the Yuan, Ming and Qing Dynasties*). Taipei: Heluo Tushu Chubanshe, 1980, p. 32.

²⁰ *Ibid.* Preface. p. 18.

Guan Yu was also esteemed by the ordinary Han people. According to the records of *Sanguo zhi* (*Historical Record of the Three Kingdoms*), written by historian Chen Shou (233-297), and depicted in the novel, Guan Yu “treated his subordinates and army well”.²¹ As a mighty general, Guan Yu was not one who rode roughshod and would not bully and humiliate his subordinates. In his relationship with Liu Bei and Zhang Fei, they were “eating at the same table and sleeping on the same bed”,²² an expression used by historians and writers to describe their relationship. Over the past several centuries, many generations of popular novelists and *xiqu* playwrights had advocated an ideal state. This ideal state included ideal moral codes and social relations, which were first condensed in the image of Guan Yu. Whether it was to his subordinates or to superior Liu Bei, Guan Yu always had a plain “equal” relationship with them. This equal relationship as demonstrated in *The Water Margin* was the close friendships the one hundred and eight heroes had where they referred to each other as brothers, in the absence of a strict hierarchy. This relationship was also reflected from different angles in novels such as *Liaozai zhiyi* (*Strange Tales from the Leisure Studio*) and *Honglou meng* (*Dream of the Red Chamber*). One could argue that whether it was in depicting ancient history or fantasy or reality, since the Ming Dynasty, writers tended to advocate a simple “equal” relationship, which led to the common saying that “true friendship was between Liu, Guan and Zhang; false friendship was between Chai, Zhao and Zheng”. Chai, Zhao and Zheng referred to Chai Rong, Zhao Kuangyin and Zheng En. Since Zhao Kuangyin became the Emperor, due to consideration of hierarchy, he could not tolerate the fact that Zheng

²¹ Ibid. p. 944.

En “offended” him, and thus he beheaded Zheng En, as we have discussed above. Consequently, Zhao Kuanyin became the symbol of hierarchy, while Guan Yu was the symbol of ancient moral concepts. These ancient moral concepts were used by the writers of the Ming and Qing Dynasties to oppose the hierarchical concepts of the strict *lixue*. The idea of “equality” embodied within was inherited and further developed into plays by the *jingju* playwrights of the late-Qing.

At the same time, the moral concepts of Gun Yu’s “loyalty” was also admired by the Qing government. Therefore, in the title granted to Guan Yu, the Qing government sought to highlight his “loyalty” and turned him into a god. This was the complexity embodied in the image of Guan Yu.

The Removal of Deity

In Chinese history, Guan Yu was a literary image in popular novels, but he also became a “sage” derived from this literary image, and later into a deity. It was wonderful that popular novels had the power to create sages. Thereafter, two sages co-existed in Chinese culture: Confucius was regarded as the civil sage, while Guan Yu was the military sage. Although Confucius and Confucianism played key roles in

²² Chen Shou. *Sanguo zhi (The History of the Three Kingdoms)*. 5 vols. Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1982, p. 939.

Chinese culture, most of the time Confucius was an idol of the upper class, while Guan Yu's influence on the ordinary people was much greater.²³

In the late-Qing, when plays of the Three Kingdoms produced an unstoppable upsurge on stage, it was only natural that audiences also wanted to see the elegant demeanor of Guan Yu. During the reigns of Emperor Daoguang and Xianfeng, the image of Guan Yu began to appear on stage. At the time, only a few plays such as *Zhan Changsha (Fighting in Changsha)* were performed. Guan Yu appeared as a “deity” and was dull and expressionless.

After the persona of Guan Yu appeared on the stage, Guan Yu plays twice suffered banning. The first happened during the Daoguang period. A famous actor of Sanqing Troupe, Mi Xizi, performed Guan Yu. Before Mi Xizi stepped on the stage, he drank a bottle of wine and due to the make-up and alcohol. The audience saw a completely different Guan Yu image on stage, causing great confusion in the theatre. They believed that “the spirits of Guan Yu had made its presence” and the news spread throughout Beijing quickly. Consequently, the government banned performances of Guan Yu plays. The second incident occurred in the Guangxu period. One member of the audience, who sat in a front-row seat, accidentally threw his cigarette butt on a pile of advertisement pamphlets, starting a fire. The news that “the spirit of Guan Yu

²³ Today, whether it was in Victoria, New South Wales, South Australia, Northern Territory, Queensland or Tasmania, we could always see statute of Guan Yu in Chinese restaurant or groceries, but we could not find a statute of Confucius.

had made its appearance” again spread amongst the people. Subsequently, the government again prohibited performances of Guan Yu plays.²⁴

Due to the great influences the image of Guan Yu had on the people and the upper society, ceremonies of offering sacrifice to Guan Yu were carried out whenever Guan Yu play was performed at the time. Was this to further mystify Guan Yu or to portray him as human? This was not an easy matter to handle in the nineteenth century. However, Wang Hongshou (1850-1925), a famous playwright in the Qing Dynasty, greatly innovated the Guan Yu plays via his unique experiences.

Wang Hongshou was born into an official family in the south China. When his father offended the superior in 1863, his whole family was executed while only Wang Hongshou escaped. Later, Wang joined an Anhui troupe in Jiangsu Province and was famous for his performances of Guan Yu plays. At the time, the performing skills of the Anhui troupes in South China, as compared with that in Beijing, are simple and unsophisticated, while the latter are more elegant. It is Wang Hongshou’s simple and unsophisticated style that won the hearts of audiences when he performed in Beijing. Consequently, Wang Hongshou realised that the image of Guan Yu admired by the people was not the image of a God that was mystified and unattainable, but one of an ordinary person that was unadorned and honest. He blended this realization into his writings, and removed Guan Yu’s deified aspect through his many years of writing

²⁴ Ye Tao. *Zhongguo jingju xisu (Customs of Jingju)*. Xian: Shaanxi Renming Chubanshe, 1994, pp. 192-93.

and performing. Wang Hongshou had written, in his life, more than twenty Guan Yu plays, depicting Guan's lifetime deeds in detail.

Under Wang Hongshou's pen, Guan Yu was not a god, but a military general with a unique personality. *Huarong dao (Huarong Path)* portrayed the complexity of his personality. The play began when Cao Cao's troops were defeated, and out of his eight hundred and thirty thousands soldiers, only fifty-three were left. He continuously suffered ambush on the way of retreat. Finally, Cao Cao decided to travel through the Huarong path and went to Jingzhou Prefecture. Unexpectedly, Guan Yu and his five hundred swordsmen ambushed him on the Huarong path and captured them. However, when confronted with Cao Cao's plea for his life, Guan Yu did not kill him. Guan Yu's character was very strong but he did not bully weak people. At the time Cao Cao the "weak person" was powerless to defend himself. This is a reason why Guan Yu did not kill Cao Cao. Moreover, Guan Yu still remembered the kindness Cao Cao had shown him earlier.

Refusal to kill Cao Cao meant that Guan Yu must die. Guan Yu was aware of this military order, and he also did not forget the oath he pledged to the Chief Commander. However, when facing death, he "sighed deeply", and chose death. Playwright Wang Hongshou fully highlighted the sympathy and personal loyalty of Guan Yu, as a peerless hero.

Dandao hui (*A Dangerous Meeting*) was a further exhibition of Guan Yu's personality. Once the Wu Kingdom offered a banquet hoping to trap Guan Yu. Guan Yu's subordinates advised Guan not to attend the banquet, but he still decided to go bringing along his assistant Zhou Cang. During the banquet, many of Wu's soldiers were restless and ready to fight. Suddenly, Guan Yu held up his sword in one hand and simultaneously captured the leader of the Wu troops, Lu Su, by the other hand. Wu's soldiers did not dare to take any reckless action. Guan Yu talked cheerfully and humorously with Lu Su until they came to the riverside where Guan Yu withdrew safely. This was another side of Guan Yu's personality. In the face of the weak, Guan Yu would give a chance for life, but confronted by a strong enemy, he would never give in. In Wang Hongshou's play, however, the reason why Guan Yu decided to attend the banquet was that, as a military general, he liked to hear words of praise for his bravery and would be really upset if people described him as timid.

The late Qing actors held that Wang Hongshou revolutionized *laoye xi* or the sage play because he deconstructed the myth of the deity of Guan Yu.²⁵ The uniqueness of Wang Hongshou was to show that immortals were also human. As a brave and powerful military general, the benevolence and equalitarian demonstrated by Guan Yu appeared realistic. In a time when human ability and knowledge were at a premium, placing hopes on deities seemed unrealistic. It was this spirit of the times, which have Wang Hongshou portrayed in his Guan Yu plays.

5.4 Conclusion

The popularity of *jingju*'s history play and their power ability to overcome legal barriers had their historic reasons. The social crisis and vitality of the late-Qing led to a reconsideration of traditional culture. At the same time, social reforms appeared to loosen the strict control over ideology. Under this background, vague historical character and events were not enough to satisfy the demands of the people during this period. Therefore, representative historical figures such as emperors and sages were brought on to the stage.

The timely spirit of late-Qing's history plays was firstly evident in their provision of historical lessons while truthfully reliving past events. These history plays encouraged critical thinking and repudiated the traditional moral code and culture. The audiences were able to consider whether the age-old hierarchy system and the moral concepts that supported this system were really merit.

The most representative form of *jingju* history play was the plays of *ma chao xi* and *da chao xi*. The emergence of these plays was unprecedented, and only possible in the late-Qing. Through their strong sentiments, these plays expressed the concept of limiting and challenging monarchical power and promoting the idea of "equality".

²⁵ Su Xue-an. *Jingju qianbei yiren huiyi lu* (*The Memoirs of the Senior Generation Artists*). See Ma Shaobo, Zhang Lihui, Tao Xiong, Zeng Bairong and Hu Bo et. Al. (Eds). *Zhongguo jingju shi* (*A History of Jingju*). Beijing: Zhongguo Xiqu Chubangshe, 1990, p. 441.

In the later period of the hierarchy system, as the social economy developed, a simple idea of equality for overcoming the hierarchy barriers was growing amongst the people. This idea was embodied in the character of Guan Yu by the writers of the Ming and Qing Dynasties. Wang Hongshou's reduction of Guan Yu to an ordinary human being echoed the sentiments of the ordinary people.

The popularity of history play in the late-Qing had its special timely significance in the history of *xiqu*. It was another attempt to review history, this time combining the unique situation of the late-Qing. This review enabled people to see that traditionally unalterable principles were not longer sacred.

The history play of the late-Qing included different categories. Apart from the plays mentioned in this chapter, which generally focused on emperors and sages, there were also others different historical figures to be mentioned later. Their idea of "equality" would also receive further analysis in the following chapter of Bao Zheng plays.

Chapter Six

Bao Zheng Plays and Courtroom Plays

From Morality to the Law

6.0 Introduction

Bao Zheng (999-1062) was a real historical figure, and also a character in literature and *xiqu*. He was an impartial executor of the law both in history and *xiqu*. Bao Zheng plays are a brilliant part of courtroom plays. In the history of Chinese *xiqu*, they are also called *qingguan xi* (“honest and upright official plays”).

The creation of the Bao Zheng plays underwent different phases. The first phase was *Yuan zaju*. Twenty-seven courtroom plays are extant from the Yuan Dynasty, about one-fifth of the total number of *Yuan zaju*. Of these, a total of twelve works are Bao Zheng plays. In *Yuan zaju*, amongst the numerous plays that focus on one character, Bao Zheng plays are the most prominent.

In the Ming and Qing Dynasties, there were specific laws that prohibited performers acting the parts of emperors and loyal subjects of past dynasties. Therefore, the image of Bao Zheng almost disappeared from *chuanqi* plays written during the Ming Dynasty. It was not until the mid-Qing that the image of Bao Zheng appeared again on stage as various regional theatre rose. There are thirty-eight extant courtroom

plays. Of these, twenty-one works were Bao Zheng plays.¹ This was another prosperous period for Bao Zheng plays and courtroom plays.

What is the difference between the Bao Zheng play in *jingju* and the Bao Zheng play in *Yuan zaju*? What are the breakthroughs of Bao Zheng plays in *jingju* and the reasons behind them? These are the topics to be explored in this chapter, which is divided into four parts. The first part is an outline of the characteristics of Bao Zheng in historical records, and an appraisal of the Bao Zheng play from different angles. Why should we view Bao Zheng play from the two angles of “courtroom play” and “honest and upright official”? This is an essential question in our understanding of Bao Zheng play.

Secondly, I will explain the different philosophical bases for the Bao Zheng play in *Yuan zaju* and in *jingju*. The former is mainly based on traditional moral concepts, while the latter focused on legal concepts. Why did such changes occur? This is a key to our further understanding of Bao Zheng plays.

In part three, I will analyse the characteristics of Bao Zheng play in *jingju*, and I will, in part four, analyse a new creative trend which included some general courtroom plays in which the leading role is no longer Bao Zheng.

¹ The above number was calculated in accordance with the *Che Wang Fu* Repertoires. See Guo Jingrui and Chen Weiwu, *Chewangfu quben tiyao* (*Summary of the Che Wang Fu Repertoire*), Guangzhou: Zhongshan Daxue Chubanshe, 1989.

Yuan zaju and *jingju* were created at different times. The Yuan playwrights were confronted by racial discrimination in the law, while *jingju* playwrights had to face the common weaknesses of the law. Literature allowed playwrights to raise their philosophical issue at different times. Consequently, this gave rise to *jingju*'s features and breakthroughs, which were different from those of *Yuan zaju*.

6.1 Historical Background and Appraisal

Bao Zheng held different posts as a historical figure, but for the common people, his most impressive role was as a judge. This impression is the result of the influence of the novel and *xiqu*. Though Bao Zheng was a true historical figure, most stories about him are fiction. Bao Zheng in play is the crystallization of all that the Chinese expected from judges in past dynasties.

Bao Zheng plays were created under a specific social condition, which determined the special nature of their content. Therefore, we need to analyse Bao Zheng plays within these specific social conditions.

6.1.1 The Historical Figure and Historical Fiction Theatre

According to *Songshi (History of the Song Dynasty)*, Bao Zheng passed the highest imperial examination in 1027. He successively served as a *Jiancha yushi* (imperial fiscal minister), *Tianzhang ge daizhi* (Alternate Academician of the Tianzhang

Pavilion), *Longtu ge zhixueshi* (Senior Academician of the Longtu Pavilion), *Shumi fushi* (Deputy-chief of Central Military Commission) and Magistrate of Kaifeng, the capital city in the North Song Dynasty (960-1126).² However, most Chinese “probably know of Bao Zheng, not as the minister and political critic of documented history, but as the courtroom judge of popular play and fiction”.³ From the historic records, Bao Zheng had the following three characteristics:

Firstly, Bao Zheng was resolute and steadfast at the imperial court. Powerful families and eunuchs supposedly shrank back at the very sound of his name. Even children and women knew his name. There was a popular saying on Bao Zheng’s honesty in the capital city, “*Guanjie budao, you yanluo baolao* (Bribery will get nowhere, because Old Bao, the King of Hell is there).”⁴ People always used “as clear water in the Yellow River” to describe Bao Zheng, who was well known as clear-sighted investigator,⁵ and the phrase “King of Hell” to describe his uprightness and outspokenness of which court officials were afraid.

Secondly, Bao Zheng was an intelligent and wise magistrate. While he was magistrate of Tianchang County, he once intelligently judged the case entitled ‘cut out the ox’s tongue’, which was recorded in the History of the Song Dynasty.

Thirdly, Bao Zheng was an official who was strict in self-discipline and managing a

² Tuo Tuo. *Song shi (The History of the Song Dynasty)*. 10 vols. Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1972. p. 10317.

³ Hayden, George A. *Crime and Punishment in Medieval Chinese Play Three Judge Pao Play*. London: Harvard University Press, 1978, p. 16.

⁴ Tuo Tuo. *Song shi (The History of the Song Dynasty)*. 10 vols. Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1972. p. 10317.

household. “Stern by nature, he hated the high-handedness of clerks and strove toward sincerity and generosity. He loathed evil, yet he was ever ready to apply good faith and sympathy. He would not toady to the opinions of others, nor would he try to please them with false words and manners. Because he never responded to personal requests for favours, his friends and relatives all broke off relations with him. Even when he was in a high position, his clothing, utensils, food, and drink were like those he had used as a commoner. He once said, ‘Should any of my descendants be guilty of corruption in office, they may not return to their home, nor may they be buried in the family plot. Whosoever does not follow my ideals is no son or grandson of mine.’”⁶

From the Yuan Dynasty onward, playwrights and novelists created the image of Bao Zheng according to these three characteristics. In the historical annals, Bao Zheng advocated reforms in many areas such as, rectifying the working style of government administrators, strengthening defence on the borderlands, reducing taxes etc. Due to his upright and outspoken personality, and his strict self-discipline, Bao Zheng enjoyed a honourable reputation amongst the people. After his death, stories about him began to spread amongst the people, and appeared in the Song dynasty’s storytelling and short stories. In Yuan *zaju*, Bao Zheng appeared on the stage as a judge and an upright government official. However, according to historical annals, apart from the case of “cut out the ox’s tongue”, no further court

⁵ In the Song Dynasty, the water of Yellow River is clear.

⁶ Ibid. p. 10318. English translation is by Hayden, George A. *Crime and Punishment in Medieval Chinese Play Three Judge Pao Plays*.

cases associated with him were recorded. The various stories and plays about him were basically the works of playwrights and novelists. The “truthfulness” of literary creation does not depend on a depiction of real events that happened in the past. Literature is a tool of the writers to express their feelings and opinions about the period they lived in, its people and events, through the use of imagination and fabrication. Such literary treatment can be applied even in the case of real historical characters. Although all sorts of stories of Bao Zheng were sheer fabrication, the plays demonstrated the essence that people needed honest and upright officials. Therefore, the theatrical image of Bao Zheng was larger than life. Because of the use of a real historical person, these plays belonged to a special category of historical play – historical fiction play.

6.1.2 The Bao Zheng Play as Courtroom Play and the Upright Officials Play

The Bao Zheng play can be appraised quite differently. Hu Shih (1891-1962) and Zheng Zhenduo (1898-1958), and other Chinese scholars placed emphasis on viewing Bao Zheng plays as courtroom plays. George A. Hayden, an American scholar, stated in his book *Crime and Punishment in Medieval Chinese Play*, “‘Courtroom play’ is the name chosen here for these twenty-seven plays. They could as easily be called ‘crime case play.’ Indeed, modern Chinese literary historians, among them Hu Shih and Zheng Zhenduo, have borrowed a term used in the sixteenth century in reference to the detective story: *gongan*, ‘crime case’ in describing the category. ‘Courtroom play,’ a term that incorporates the one element shared by all the plays, the courtroom scene, seems particularly suitable and will be

used exclusively in this study.”⁷ The term courtroom play highlights the common ground of these plays and stories, which involved matters of documentation and judgment.

However, if the Chinese traditional criminal case plays, especially the Bao Zheng play, is only evaluated from the angle of “courtroom play”, then we cannot properly grasp its true significance. For this reason, scholars for many years mainly viewed Bao Zheng plays from the perspective of “the play of the honest and upright official”. “The plays of the honest and upright official were a reaction against the injustice in Chinese traditional society. The longing for honest and upright officials grew stronger as the society became more corrupt. The creation of honest and upright officials in *xiqu* provided excellent examples.”⁸

To say that Bao Zheng plays are “courtroom plays” or “honest and upright official plays” reflect two different perspectives. For the “courtroom play”, a greater sense of realism was required. In addition to the complex plot, the process of court trials and judgments must be performed according to proper legal procedures. However, the Bao Zheng plays of the *Yuan zaju* often depended on Bao Zheng’s intelligence, not the operation of the law in the judgment of cases. For example, *Chenzhou tiaomi* (*Selling Rice at Chenzhou*) is an excellent play, about Chenzhou Prefecture’s major three yearlong droughts. The Imperial court decided to send two government

⁷ Hayden, George A. *Crime and Punishment in Medieval Chinese Play Three Judge Pao Plays*. London: Harvard University Press. 1978, p. 2.

⁸ Zheng Chuanyin. *Zhongguo xiqu wenhua gailun (An Introduction to the History of Chinese Xiqu)*. Wuhan: Wuhan Daxue Chubanshe, 1993, p. 253.

officials to Chenzhou to open the official granary and sell rice to the refugees. Lord Liu Yanei recommended his son Liu Dezhong and his son-in-law Yang Jinwu for the positions. Liu Dezhong and Yang Jinwu raised the price of rice, and even mixed soil and chaff into the rice to make a profit for themselves. If anyone refused to accept it, they would use a gold mace,⁹ which was granted by the emperor, to beat the person to death. Peasant Zhang Biegu died under the gold mace. Bao Zheng came to Chenzhou to investigate and decided to sentence Liu Dezhong and Yang Jinwu to death. Lord Liu pleaded for a letter of pardon from the Emperor, which “pardons only the living but not the dead.” This meant that Liu Dezhong and Yang Jinwu would be pardoned, and the peasant Zhang Biegu, who was already dead, should not be pardoned. Forestalling the Emperor, Bao Zheng decapitated Yang Jinwu, and let peasant Zhang Biegu’s son beat Liu Dezhong to death using the gold mace. Then Bao Zheng explained the meaning of the pardon letter: Zhang Biegu’s son should be pardoned since he is living; Liu Dezhong and Yang Gingu should not be forgiven because they were already dead. This play demonstrated Bao Zheng’s intelligence and his uprightness in not pandering to the superiority of Lord Liu Yanei. However, Bao Zheng handled this case by using the flexibility of the Chinese language to interpret the Emperor’s imperial decree. This is the working of Bao Zheng’s intelligence not the law. Another example is *Lu Zailang* (*Bao Zheng Beheads Lu Zailang*). The criminal, Lu Zailang, was a relative of the Emperor, and violated the law for self-amusement, and to show off his power and influence. In his report to Imperial Court requesting the beheading of Lu Zailang, Bao Zheng used

⁹ When granted with golden mace by the emperor, that person has the right to execute a criminal first and report to the emperor afterward.

another name in the details of the criminal case. When the court verdict came, Bao Zheng changed the name into “Lu Zailang”. This is also an example of the working of his intelligence not the law.

This type of play had a large market amongst the common people. The audiences liked the illegal action of the law enforcer. They felt thrilled at the satisfactory outcomes. Yet, how could the playwrights be brave enough to create this type of play? They created these plays not to seek dramatic effect, but to show their oppositional attitudes towards the law of the society they lived in. It was an era of imperfect laws and much injustice. “The law recognized the different status between royalty, government officials, common people and slave. Not only did the law stipulate that the life style would differ according to the different social and legal statuses, it further specified that people of different legal status would receive different treatment. Royalty and government officials would enjoy legal privileges, while slaves, being the lowest social class, would suffer legal discrimination.”¹⁰

The dark reality and inequitable laws could not be altered by the hands of the playwrights. The law remained outside the power of the people. Thus, the stage was the only place to release their anger. The intelligence of Bao Zheng and his illegal actions as a law enforcer were demonstrations of the playwright’s dissatisfaction towards the unequal legal system. Hence, the purpose of the Bao Zheng play was an attempt to equalize the unequal laws. If Bao Zheng did not twist the imperial laws,

¹⁰ Qu Tongzhu, *Zhongguo falü he zhongguo shehui* (*The Chinese Laws and the Chinese Society*), Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1981, p. 326.

the task of punishing the privileged class would be hard to achieve. Consequently, the Bao Zheng play was the product of human emotions, not a legal court dossier.

It was at the time when there were so much injustice that plays of courtroom cases and of honest and upright officials were produced, in which the law enforcer would violate the law. In other words, it was the injustice of the laws and the corrupt society, which led to the need for the existence of honest and upright officials to represent common people's anger. Thus, the way to truly understand the depth and to grasp the essence of the Bao Zheng play was not only through the perspective of the factual "courtroom", but also from the more emotional 'honest and upright officials'.

6.2 From Morality to Law

Bao Zheng plays in *Yuan zaju* and *jingju*, had common ground in that they both belonged to courtroom plays, and they are also called plays of upright and honest officials. In addition, both of *Yuan zaju* and *jingju* involved the law and legal procedures. However, they also had their differences. The former was mainly based on traditional moral codes, while the latter emphasised legal concepts. This change has its special historical reasons, and at the same time, the function of literature played a significant role.

6.2.1 The Differences in the Laws of the Yuan and Qing Dynasties

Yuan zaju was created in the early Yuan Dynasty of the thirteenth century. *Jingju* was produced in the nineteenth century during the late-Qing. Different social backgrounds determined differences in the laws of the two dynasties. The laws of the Yuan Dynasty not only contained elements of racial discrimination, but also contained inequality between social classes under the monarchy system. Of the two, racial discrimination was the major issue. In the Qing Dynasty, as elements of racial discrimination were abolished in the law, inequality between social classes in the law became the main problem.

The rulers of the Yuan Dynasty were the Mongolian nobility. The Yuan Dynasty was short-lived, partly because it condoned more obvious racial discrimination, and such discrimination was clearly reflected in the law. The Yuan government had divided different ethnic groups into four classes. The first class was the Mongolians and the second class was the *Semu*. Han Chinese living in Northern China belonged to the third class. While the Han living in the South belonged to the lowest class. Since Mongolians were first class citizens, they were given privileges in the face of criminal law. According to the criminal legislation of the Yuan, murderers must be executed. Anyone who committed murder or manslaughter while under the influence of alcohol or killed the mediator instead, was also subject to the death penalty.¹¹ However, Mongolians who committed murder under the influence of alcohol or due to verbal arguments were only transported to penal servitude.¹² In another example, the law stated, if a thief stole for the first time, he should be punished by tattooing his

¹¹ Song Lian, *Yuan shi (The History of the Yuan Dynasty)*. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1976, vol. 9. pp. 2675 and 2678

left arm; if he stole again, his right arm will be tattooed; if he stole for the third time, his neck will be tattooed. However, if a Mongolian violated the same law, he was not to be punished by tattooing.¹³

Unlike the Yuan Dynasty, the laws of the Qing did not possess obvious elements of racial discrimination and racial privileges. In Chinese history, the Qing Dynasty was the longest non-Han ruling dynasty. The rulers of the Qing were the Manchu nobility. Although the Qing government strived to uphold the rights and interests of Manchu and their own culture, the government also placed greater emphasis on national unity. As a ruling ethnic group, many Manchu became poverty-stricken, yet many people of other ethnic group became high-ranking officials. Although there were traces of racial discrimination in real life, officially the Qing rulers did not divide different ethnic group into different classes, nor was there clear evidence that could prove the Qing government had offer Manchu special privileges

However, this did not mean the arrival of equitable laws. Though elements of obvious racial discrimination in the law were abolished along with the overthrow of the Yuan Dynasty, yet the Qing playwrights were faced with the common drawbacks of law under the traditional monarchy system.

The traditional laws of China were established under the guidance of Confucianism and the *lixue* moral codes. The core of Confucianism and *lixue* was the idea of

¹² Ibid. P. 2675.

¹³ Ibid. P. 2656.

hierarchy. Based on this idea, the law displayed different treatment towards people of different social status. In face of the law that states one should pay for the life of one's victim, a master who killed an innocent slave or servant¹⁴ was only subject to eighty-seven blows (using a large rod), while the legal punishment was reduced when the master killed the slave or servant under the influence of alcohol.¹⁵ The lack of protection for the lives of slaves was demonstrated in these inequitable laws.

The law that was formulated in the light of traditional moral codes exhibited inequality and strictness in its treatment of sexual relationships. According to the law, if a master committed adultery with the wife of his servant, he was not guilty. However, if a servant committed adultery with the wife of his master, he must be executed.¹⁶ If the master's wife committed adultery with a servant and then eloped, both of them should be sentenced to death.¹⁷ The harshness of law originated from the strict nature of the traditional moral codes.

Further, traditional moral codes specially emphasised the relationships of the patriarchal clan system. Therefore, the law had different treatment for each member of the family. When a father unreasonably killed his son, he was only punishable by seventy-seven blows.¹⁸ If a son injured his father, he must be beheaded.¹⁹ If a

¹⁴ The change of dynasty caused prisoners of war to become slaves, and children of poor families were sold to become servants of wealth families. The people who lived in the lowest stratum of the society had tragic lives.

¹⁵ Song Lian. *Yuan shi (The History of the Yuan Dynasty)*. Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1976, vol. 9. p. 2677.

¹⁶ Ibid. p. 2655.

¹⁷ Ibid. p. 2655.

¹⁸ Ibid. p. 2676

¹⁹ Ibid. p. 2651

concubine murdered the wife, she must be executed, while if the wife killed the concubine, she was only subjected to ninety-seven blows.²⁰ Furthermore, if a son did not show filial obedience, his father and brothers or cousins could kill him. Once the son was killed, the father would not be guilty, but his brother and cousin would be liable for one hundred and seventy blows.²¹ Why should they all be subjected to such harsh punishments except the father? This was called “to bear the fault for the elders”. In the traditional moral codes, it was regarded as a virtue or *tianli* for sons, servants, subordinates and government officials to bear the fault of one’s father, master, superior and Emperor. Under the traditional “virtue” and “*tianli*”, when faults or crimes were committed by the father, master, superior or emperor, the son, servant, subordinate or government official always became the scapegoats.

The problems of different treatment also arose in litigation. According to the law, if a husband committed a crime, unless the crime was grave, his wife must tolerate and conceal for him. If the husband was not guilty of the most heinous crimes, but the wife still brought a proceeding against him, she was subject to forty-seven blows.²² If the son and servant came to the court to act as witnesses to bring in evidence against their father or master, they violated the teachings of moral and ethics, prohibited under the law.²³ All of these laws were regarded as perfectly justified and was regarded as “rule of virtue”.

²⁰ Ibid. p. 2676.

²¹ Ibid. p. 2676.

²² Ibid. p. 2671.

²³ Ibid. p. 2671.

6.2.2 The Function of Literature and the Background of the Late Qing

In the face of inequitable laws, the function of literature was to raise and reflect on issues related to the law. This is closely linked to the conscience of playwrights. In *Yuan zaju*, playwrights always used extra-legal methods. The traditional moral code – *tianli* supported the use of extra-legal methods. The meaning of *tianli* in the Yuan Bao Zheng plays was the principle or truth of things and the reason or sense that existed in common people's mind; it also included traditional Confucianism and *lixue* teachings. This was an inclusive concept. Justice overwhelms unjust law. Under this *tianli*, Bao Zheng made extra-legal acts wise or upright. Indubitably, this type of play is inspiring. The reason why this kind of play set the hearts of the audiences aflame is that they opposed racial discrimination in the law.

To give an example, *Hudie meng (Dreaming of Butterflies)* depicted the story of Ge Biao, a member of the royal family, who beat an old man, Wang Laohan, to death. Wang Laohan's eldest son sought revenge for his father, so he killed Ge Biao. During the trial, Bao Zheng ordered one of the three Wang brothers to pay for the life of Ge Biao. The three brothers all fought to pay for Ge Biao's life, even Wang Laohan's wife joined the competition. Finally, Mrs. Wang decided to use her youngest son's life to pay for Ge's life. Bao Zheng was puzzled and he thought that the youngest son must not be her own child. In fact, the youngest son was her own,

while both elder sons were not. Bao Zheng was touched and decided to save the life of the youngest son.

According to the criminal law of the Yuan Dynasty, “A person who seeks revenge for the death of his father by killing the murderer is innocent of his crime. Further, he could demand funeral expenses up to the amount of fifty taels of silver from the family of his father’s murderer.”²⁴ Ge Biao beat Wang Laohan to death, and Wang Laohan’s son killed Ge Biao as a way of seeking revenge. Wang’s son should be deemed not guilty and be released; they could even receive fifty taels of silver from Ge Biao’s family to bury their father. However, Bao Zheng decided that one of Wang’s sons should pay for the life of Ge Biao because Ge Biao was a relative of the royal family and a Mongolian. The Yuan laws states, when Mongolians Chinese and Han Chinese engage in fights, and the Han is beaten up, the Han must not return blows but report to the court.²⁵ Since Wang’s son had returned blows, they not only lost their rights to plead, but became defendants. This was the injustice of Yuan dynasty’s law, which was built upon racial discrimination. The sentimental value of *Dreaming of Butterflies* lay in Bao Zheng not yielding to the unjust laws. In the name of *tianli*, he ultimately used extra-legal measures to save Wang’s son.

However, *tianli* also had its limitation. Since most of the Yuan Bao Zheng plays used extra-legal methods, these plays always began with a serious criminal case and ended in a wise story, in some way similar to the wise stories in the *Arabian Nights*.

²⁴ Ibid. p. 2675.

²⁵ Ibid. p. 2673.

Furthermore, since *tianli* and morals both contain the idea of hierarchy from Confucianism and *lixue*, it is possible that playwrights may create an inequitable situation under the influence of *tianli*. For example, in *Dreaming of Butterflies*, Bao Zheng, in order to save Wang Laohan's son called upon a prisoner named Zhao Wuanlǔ, who stole horses, to substitute for Wang's youngest son. In the end, Zhao Wuanlǔ was executed, and Wang's son was saved

The key to the problem is that Zhao Wuanlǔ should not have been a scapegoat. According to the laws of the Yuan Dynasty, "For horse thieves, the principal should be beaten eighty-seven blows and receive two years in prison. For repeats of the same offence, the punishment doubles."²⁶ The offence committed by Zhao Wuanlǔ never deserved death. Further, he was not the murderer in this case. As for Bao Zheng, when he saw that members of the Wang family all fought to use their own life to repay the life of Ge Biao, he felt that they were moral family, and deserved to be saved. However, it was under the name of *tianli* that Bao Zheng caused another case of injustice. The playwright neglected the fact that a horse thief also had a right to live. This plot is, in fact, the unreasonable outcome of the influence of traditional concepts of morality and hierarchy.

Unlike the *Yuan zaju*, Bao Zheng play in *jingju* strengthened the legal sense. These legal ideas were the idealized laws of the playwrights. When playwrights used the law as weapon, their aim was to explore its unreasonable elements. The plays

²⁶ Ibid. p. 2657.

Tuanyuan zhihou (After the Reunion) demonstrate the consequences of such law and penal codes.

After the Reunion begins at the point Shi Yi-sheng came first in the Imperial examination. He felt grateful to his mother, Ye Wanniang, who had brought him up alone as a widow. Shi Yi-sheng made a request to the Emperor to erect a monument to his mother. Shi Yi-sheng then married Liu Yi-er, a beautiful girl. While many happy events came together and the family was reunited, a tragedy was in the making. Twenty years ago, Ye Wanniang was deeply in love with a scholar Zheng Sicheng, but they were not allowed to be marry by their families. Therefore, after the death of her husband, Ye Wanniang and Zheng Sicheng engaged in an illicit sexual relationship, and She Yi-sheng was their child. Three days after Shi Yi-sheng and Liu Yi-er's wedding, coincidently, Liu Yier saw her mother-in-law secretly meeting Zheng Sicheng. Ye Wanniang was much embarrassed and hanged herself. In order to protect the reputation of her mother-in-law and the future of her husband, Liu Yi-er volunteered to bear the crime of hounding her mother-in-law to death. Consequently, Liu Yi-er was sentenced to death. Judge Du Guozhong eavesdropped when Shi Yi-sheng came to visit his wife in prison and discovered the truth. He wanted to impeach Shi Yi-sheng with the crime of deceiving the Emperor to build a monument of chastity for his unchaste mother. In a state of despair, Shi Yi-sheng wanted to commit suicide. But when he saw Zheng Sicheng visits his mother's grave, Shi Yi-sheng blamed him for all these troubles. He proposed a toast and gave a glass of poisoned wine to Zheng Sicheng. Even though Zheng Sicheng

knew that it was poison, he drank it all. Before he died, he told Shi Yi-sheng about his painful love for Ye Wanniang. Father and son wept in each other's arms. Subsequently, Shi Yi-sheng also drank a glass of poison to die together with his father. Although Liu Yi-er was released by Du Guozhong, what awaited her was a monument of chastity that prevented her from remarrying. Grief stricken, Liu Yi-er ran into the monument and died.²⁷

Why was a love story turned into a tragedy? Just as Shi Yi-sheng cried out before his death: "What crime has my father done? What crime has my mother committed?" Why did the innocent Ye Wanniang and Zheng Sicheng commit suicide? It was because what awaited them was not only legal prosecution, but also more horrifyingly, they ruined the future of their son. In was in this kind of total despair that they committed suicide.

Under the guidance of traditional moral codes, the law condoned tolerance and concealments towards the elders. In the play, Liu Yi-er bore the "fault" of her mother-in-law, while Shi Yi-sheng tried to conceal this "family scandal". According to the traditional moral standards, they were the ones with true morality. However, their lives ended tragically. If they had reported this to the court or admitted the truth, they would have been regarded un-filial. If they concealed the truth, Liu Yi-er must die, while Shi Yi-sheng would be left with the crime of deceiving the Emperor. The tragedy was caused by a law that was based traditional moral codes.

²⁷ This play is not *jingju* play. It is a type of regional theatre from Fujian province. See Cheng Lie, Liu Xiangru and Lin Ruiwei. *Fujian difang xiqu (The Regional Theatres of Fujian Province)*. Fuzhou:

In the late Qing era, the legal system received the first improvement of epoch-making significance. As mentioned in the chapter five, the late-Qing was a time for change. As the door to China opened and the rise of *yangwu yundong* (the Western Movement), religious restrictions were lifted. Western sciences were imported. The Qing government also sent out students to study abroad and built new style schools. All these demonstrated a new and dynamic atmosphere that seeks practicality and reform. Under the driving force of the international situation, the Qing government appointed Shen Jiaben and Wu Tingfang as government officials responsible for revising statutes in 1902.²⁸ They were to revise current legislation in reference to other countries' laws. Their duties included drawing lessons from Western experience to revise old statutes, formulate new laws, and abolish outmoded regulation and irrational practices. In 1907, a newly structured courtroom was first introduced in Heilongjiang, Changchun and Jilin Provinces, and was later used in other provinces.²⁹

According to the historical records of the Qing Dynasty, the intention of these amendments was to separate the law from the so-called morals. It was directed at the drawbacks of mixing law with morals, as apparent in traditional laws.³⁰ The hierarchical concept was the main reason for the injustice of law. During the process

Fujian Renmin Chubanshe, 1997, p. 118.

²⁸ Shen Jiaben used to be *Ancha shi* (the head of provincial legal department), and he was proficient in statutes of past dynasties. Wu Yanfang studied aboard in England, and later became a lawyer.

²⁹ Gu Hongting. *Zhongguo jindaishi (A Modern History of China)*. Taipei: Sanmin Shuju, 1994, p.189.

of amendment, the traditional concept of “slave” was replaced by *gu gongren* (hired labour).³¹ Three traditional cruel tortures, such as *linchi* (put to death by dismembering the body), were abolished.

Bao Zheng plays and courtroom plays in *jingju* were prophetic of the changes of the late-Qing. The drawbacks of the old laws were exposed by these plays. The function of literature and the conscience of the playwright were to unceasingly uncover and expose social problems. Yuan playwrights used the traditional moral codes to attack racial discrimination and inequitable laws and hence contain significance eventually. If playwrights of the Qing continued to use the traditional moral concepts to criticise the law, the significance and impact would be weakened. This is the reason why the philosophical base of Bao Zheng plays shifted from morality to law.

6.3 Bao Zheng Plays in *Jingju*

Equality before the law was the high note struck by *jingju* plays. Equality here had two meanings: firstly, the same law is to be equally applied to everybody, including the relatives of the judges. Secondly, regardless of the social status, including the royal family, everybody is entitled to a fair trial. These are the subjects explored by the *jingju* playwrights of the late-Qing. The playwrights’ thinking also touched on the investigation, legal procedures, and the weaknesses of the traditional legal

³⁰ Zhao Erxun. *Qingshi gao* (*A History of the Qing Dynasty*). 48 vols. Zhonghua Shuju, 1977, p.

system. All of these demonstrate the characteristics of *jingju*, which were different from those of the Yuan *zaju*.

6.3.1 Impartial Executor of the Law and the Desire for Legal Equality

The judge's performance is a factor in the just implementation of the law even today. The importance of the judge is that he metes out rewards or punishments quite independently. The *jingju* play *Zha Bao Mian* (*Bao Zheng Decapitates Bao Mian*) aimed to portray the image of an upright judge.

Bao Zheng Decapitates Bao Mian describes the story of Bao Zheng sentencing his nephew, a corrupt official, to death. It opens at the point when Bao Zheng accepted an imperial order to go to Chenzhou Prefecture to deal with the refugees who were suffering a drought. Many government officials went to the Shili Pavilion to give him a send-off party. Bao Mian, Bao Zheng's nephew, also came to farewell his uncle as instructed by his mother. During the party Bao Mian talked with official Zhao Bing about his acceptance of a bribe when he was an officer in Sha County of Yue prefecture. Zhao Bing felt a personal enmity against Bao Zheng, and so used this event to blackmail him. Bao Zheng was very angry. He ordered Bao Mian to be decapitated. Bao Mian begged Zhao Bing to intercede for him, and promised to give him three vats of silver as a reward. Zhao Bing pleaded with Bao Zheng for mercy but was not successful. Bao Mian asked the Prime Minister Wang Yanlin to save

4191.

³¹ Ibid. p. 4188.

him. Wang Yanlin tried to persuade Bao Zheng not to destroy his own elder brother's son. However, legally, Bao Zheng had no other choice. He beheaded his nephew, and set out for Chenzhou prefecture.

In *Yuan zaju*, Bao Zheng mainly had to face rascals and influential officials. However, would he behave equally without discrimination if things happened in his family? This was a matter that Yuan playwrights did not deal with, but it was interesting to both Qing audiences and playwrights. *Bao Zheng Decapitates Bao Mian* filled this gap, allowing people to see how Bao Zheng handled his relationship with his family.

Bao Zheng was placed in numerous contradictory situations, firstly, between Bao Zheng and his political enemy, Zhao Bing; and secondly, between Bao Zheng and his superior, Wang Yanlin. In these two relationships, Bao Zheng chose the law. The climax of the play was how Bao Zheng handled his relationship with Bao Mian. As an upright judge, Bao Zheng was not just a personification of an abstract concept. The playwright repeatedly emphasized Bao Zheng's complex mental struggle. It involved Bao Zheng's experience when he was a child: Bao Zheng's parents died just after he was born and he was brought up by his elder brother's family. Bao Zheng's sister-in-law breast-fed Bao Zheng three times a day, as if he were her own son. When Bao Zheng thought of how his sister-in-law nurtured him, he wanted to forgive Bao Mian as a way of repaying his sister-in-law. The play

demonstrated Bao Zheng's gratitude towards his sister-in-law, which served as a foil to his spirit of upholding the law regardless of personal consideration.

Bao Zheng Decapitates Bao Mian was a play that had a great impact. Historically, there was no record of Bao Zheng's nephew being executed due to his corruption. The playwright borrowed the name and reputation of Bao Zheng to fabricate this story. It was intended to show people's hate towards corrupted officials. Since the mid-Qing, corruption and degeneration were very serious. The mid-Qing was a period of so-called peace and prosperity. Though Emperors Yongzheng and Qianlong adopted stricter and stricter measures to punish corrupt officials,³² corruption still could not be controlled. For example, He Shen (1750-1799), the Prime Minister, especially trusted and favored by Emperor Qianlong, was executed in 1799 for corruption. His family property was worth about forty-one million two hundred thousand taels of silver. During the late-Qing, as the dynasty declined, corruption became more and more serious. Amongst the six government departments, the military department and the tax department were the most corrupted while being the ones, which were supposed to be trusted by the Emperor. The staff in charge of the official *yinku* (money warehouse) was carefully selected. To avoid corruption, these administrators change every three years. However, an administrator of the money warehouse could embezzle at least more than one hundred thousand taels of silver during their three-year term.³³ A late-Qing high-

³² See Dai Yi, *Qianlongdi jiqi shidai (Emperor Qianlong and his Time)*, Beijing: Zhongguo Renmin Daxue Chubanshe, 1997, p. 123.

³³ Li Tiangang. "Qingmo zhanggu" (Historical Events of the late-Qing). In *Duzhe (Readers)*, Chen Shaoquan (chief ed), 1996, vol 1, p 16.

ranking official in the Foreign Affairs Department, Deng Chengxiu (1841 - 1892), wrote a report to the Emperor concerning corruption in customs house. After listing the names of the corrupt officials, Deng Chengxiu sighed painfully, "These days, it is extremely hard for government institutions and departments to apply for more government funds, but millions taels of taxes falls into the hands of these 'jackals and wolves'. However, the Emperor does not take up such matters, this I really cannot understand." ³⁴

The value of *Bao Zheng Decapitates Bao Mian* was that the playwright closely linked anti-corruption with upholding the law. In attacking concealment between relatives and the fact that officials only protect their self-interest, the playwright presented us with the concept of impartial law. This concept was the forerunner of the concept of equality before the law.

Equality before the law means that whoever violates the law must be subject to the same legal punishment, even the Emperor. *Limao huan taizi* (*Heir Apparent Exchanged for a Leopard Cat*) narrated a story of the Emperor being punished. The play described Bao Zheng, who just came back from Chenzhou Prefecture, where he had dealt with the refugees. When he passed through Zhaozhou City, someone stopped his sedan chair to bring a lawsuit. That person was, surprisingly, Grand Empress Li, the concubine of the late Emperor Song Zhenzong (r. 998-1022). More

³⁴ Deng Chengxiu. "Qing Chicha guanshui qinshi yi yu guoyong shu" (*A Report Present to the Emperor: Inquiry into the Malpractices of Customs House is Beneficial to the Nation*). In Qiu Jiang. *Lingnan lidai wenxuan* (*Selective Historical Essays from Guangdong*). Guangzhou: Guangdong Renmin Chubanshe, 1993, p. 458.

than twenty years before, both concubine Li and concubine Liu had become pregnant at the same time. Li's son was born first, and so according to the Emperor's decree, Li would become Empress and her son would become crown prince. Concubine Liu was jealous. In order to take the position of Empress, Liu put a skinned leopard's body in place of Li's son, and stole Li's son. She then ordered the imperial palace maid, Kou Chengyu, to drown the child in a palace pond. Fortunately, with the help of Kou Chengyu and eunuch Chen Lin, Li's son was sent to Zhao Yuanzhuo, the elder brother of Emperor Song Zhenzong, who never took an interest in politics.

When Emperor Zhenzong saw the leopard, he believed that it was a demon, and Li was imprisoned in a house called "cold palace". Concubine Liu then ordered servants to burn the "cold palace". Fortunately, concubine Li escaped from the imperial palace with some aid, to Zhaozhou. Ten years later, Li's son entered the imperial palace. Concubine Liu suspected him, due to his age and facial features. She questioned Kou Chengyu and Chen Lin and even ordered Chen Lin to cruelly torture Kou Chengyu. Kou Chengyu beat her head on the stairs and died. Later Li's son became the Crown prince and then Emperor Renzong as Zhao Yuanzhuo's son.

When Bao Zheng understood the circumstances surrounding this case, he came to the imperial palace to interrogate the Emperor. Emperor Renzong wanted to behead Bao Zheng, but with Chen Lin's evidence uncovered the truth. In the end, the Emperor welcomed back his mother.

We may be weary of hearing stories of internal struggles in the imperial court. The strength of this play lies in punishing the Emperor, which is the play's main theme. The Emperor's crime was *buxiao* (not in accordance with filial piety). This was a serious crime in the traditional Chinese society. The Emperor was like Oedipus in Greek tragedy, ignorant of the facts. But even then, the Emperor should not shirk his responsibility. Thus, he had no other option but to take off his imperial robe and have it accept the punishment as his substitute. As mentioned in chapter five, this was a true method of punishment in the traditional Chinese society. Here, the imperial robe also symbolizes power, and the playwright implies that no matter how much power one has, that person should still be punished if he or she violates the law.

In Chinese traditional society, emperors always placed themselves above the law. Qianlong was not a cruel emperor in the history of the Qing Dynasty. However, many officials were killed simply because he did not like them. In 1748, the death of Emperor Qianlong's wife caused great disturbance. More than one hundred officials were punished, and three were executed. The reason was merely that there were some inconsistencies in the funeral arrangements. Fifty-three senior local officials were dismissed or demoted because they did not take the initiative to come to Beijing to express mourning. Many officials were almost killed because they had their hair cut in the hundred-day mourning period, which was taken as a sign of

disrespect to the Empress' power.³⁵ Hair cutting during the mourning period "was not forbidden in the law. Neither Han nor Manchu officials were clear about it. Over ten years before, when Qianlong's father, the Emperor Yongzheng, died, many officials had their hair cut, but they were not punished."³⁶ However, Qianlong wanted to punish his subjects, and he had the power to do so. No law was able to overturn the decision made by the Emperor when he was angry, and no law was able to punish the evil of an emperor. The playwright of *Heir Apparent Exchanged for a Leopard Cat* obviously considered these issues.

The concept of equality before the law is portrayed in *Za mei ji* (*Bao Zheng Decapitates Chen Shimei*). The play is the story of a case that involved two deaths. The plaintiff, Qin Xianglian, was forced to seek justice from Bao Zheng. Bao Zheng arrested the defendant, Chen Shimei, and put him on trial. Chen Shimei was the son-in-law of the Emperor. Faced with creditable material evidence and testimony of witnesses, Chen Shimei could not deny his crime. However, he maintained that the Emperor should decide the case himself. Confronted by Chen Shimei's shameless act, Bao Zheng answered, "Since the evidence is sufficient, you are no longer a member of the royal family, but a convicted criminal in the eyes of the law. Your noble position shall not extenuate, but aggravate your punishment." The Princess and the Empress Dowager both came to Chen's rescue. Bao Zheng declared explicitly,

³⁵ Dai Yi, *Qianlongdi jiqi shidai* (*Emperor Qianlong and his time*), Beijing: Renmin Daxue Chubanshe, 1997, pp. 162-76.

“Law is law. The judicial decision shall not be interfered with by outside influence. As the Emperor has given me three methods of execution for the three classes of society, the nobles, the middle class and the low class, this man shall not be an exception!”³⁷

This is law, which is equal no matter whether you are a noble or a member of the middle class or low class. But the law in the play makes distinctions between these three classes, which is reflected in the three methods that the Emperor gave Bao Zheng. The distinction is that the nobles knew the law and therefore their crimes were more serious than those of the low classes. Therefore, Bao Zheng had three different guillotines to treat different prisoners, the sharpest guillotine for nobles.

Bao Zheng Decapitates Chen Shimei portrayed Bao Zheng as a character not subject to the interference of authority. When the Emperor Dowager obstructed Bao Zheng in carrying out the death sentence, he took off his official clothes and hat, putting on the guillotines, then he declared, “I’d rather lose my position than seeing the law not executed.” The law must be upheld even at the cost of his position or life. Chen Shimei was eventually beheaded.

6.3.2 Legal Procedure and Scepticism of Honest Official

In *jingju* plays, though Bao Zheng’s power was given to him by the Emperor, in a contest between his family member and justice, Bao chose justice. Between the

³⁶ Ibid. p. 168.

³⁷ English translation is by Zung, Cecilia S. L. *Secrets of the Chinese Play*. London: George G. Harrap & Co., Ltd., 1937, p. 199.

imperial family and justice, Bao Zheng still chose justice. Bao Zheng had an indomitable spirit in the fight for justice. This kind of spirit allowed Bao Zheng to become the symbol of law in the *jingju* plays.

Law should be exercised in accordance with legal procedure; it must be based on investigation, obtaining legal evidence and other legal processes. *Qiyuan bao* (*A Great Case of Injustice*) reflected this characteristic. The play consisted of eight volumes and ninety-five scenes. The story is about businessmen, Liu Zihua and Zhang Qixian, who went together to Guangdong Province for their business. When they passed through a forest they stopped to rest. While Zhang Qixian went to find water, a local hunter, Wu Gongxu, murdered Liu Zihua and stole his luggage. Zhang came back with the water. The two porters hired by Zhang and Liu also arrived just then. Zhang Qixian thought that the porters had murdered Liu Zihua for the luggage, while the two porters assumed that Zhang had killed his companion for money. The two sides argued and took the matter to court.

The owner of the forest farm, Chen Kui, discovered Liu Zihua's body. He moved the body away from the forest in order to avoid trouble. Then he stole the corpse's clothes. When he was discovered, was arrested as the murderer and was sentenced to death by the head of Meizhou Prefecture, Chang Jingan. Wang Xiaohuai, a woodman, saw two ownerless donkeys wandering in the forest farm. His head turned by greed, he killed the two donkeys and sold the meat. He was also arrested as the murderer. Chang Jingan released Chen Kui and sentenced Wang Xiaohuai to death.

Bao Zheng was under imperial orders to make an inspection tour. When he came to Meizhou Prefecture. Wang Lijuan, Wang Xiaohuai's daughter, sought justice from Bao Zheng. Bao Zheng disguised himself as a flower seller and rice seller to investigate. Wu Gongxiu, the murderer, tricked Wang Lijuan to his house. He wanted to kill Wang Lijuan to prevent her divulging his secrets. However, Wu Gongxiu was attracted by Wang Lijuan's beauty and forced her to become his concubine. Therefore, Wu Gongxiu had an argument with his wife and killed her. Taking advantage of this occasion, Wang Lijuan escaped. The conspiracy was brought to light and Wu Gongxiu fled. On the way he met Bao Zheng. Bao Zheng told him that he needed a partner for his business. Wu Gongxiu joined as partner by using the money of the murdered man. Bao Zheng finally found out the truth. He executed Wu Gongxiu and released Wang Xiaohuai.

A Great Case of Injustice involved a double murder case; the head of Meizhou Prefecture, Chang Jingan almost wrongly sentenced two people to death. How was Bao Zheng able to redress justice and discover the true murderer? The playwright highlighted the flexibility of Bao Zheng's methods of investigation and his earnest attitude towards investigation, thus promoting the concept of careful investigation.

The first-rank court official is dressing as a flower seller.

A pair of silver grass shoes is traveling through many territory."³⁸

³⁸ Liu Liemao, Su Huanzhong and Guo Jingrui ed., *Che Wang Fu quben jinghua liuce (The Essence of Che Wang Fu Repertoire six volumes)*, Guangzhou: Zhongshan Daxue Chubanshe, 1991, vol. 3, p. 423.

Taking on the persona of a flower seller because he understood that women liked flowers, Bao Zheng met with prisoner Wang Xiaohui's wife Meishi and Chen Kui's wife Liangshi. However, Meishi and Liangshi believed that "a flower seller cannot do anything even if he is told of the injustice". Bao Zheng did not get angry because of their distrust. "Does a flower seller have no sympathy and knowledge of the society? Where have not my footsteps been? I might be able to help you." Bao Zheng's speech was kind, without traces of a bureaucratic tone. People in total despair grasp any ray of hope. It was Bao Zheng's knowledge in giving sympathetic guidance that gave hope to these two women with "nowhere to seek justice", convinced them that he was a "good, honest old man, and encouraged them to tell him the truth.

When faced with the murderer Wu Gongxiu, Bao Zheng cleverly changed his persona and explained, "To tell you the truth, I have traveled to this province to sell rice. I lack a partner, but I heard that plenty of people from my hometown in Jiangxi Province are living here, so I am here to find a partner for my business. I have brought some flowers, hoping to make some money on the way, but this is not my real business." This way, not only did Bao Zheng avoid the suspicion of a "foreign accent", but he also tricked Wu Gongxiu with the idea that he needed a partner. Wu Gongxiu, who had killed Liu Zihua and then his wife, desperately wanted to flee. Once he heard Bao Zheng's need of a partner, he immediately offered himself as the

partner. In the process of a friendly conversation, Bao Zheng found out the details of the case.

How could Bao Zheng discover so many clues and so much evidence? The key was that he was able to use different skills to handle various situations. The conclusion was established at the end of the investigation, not before. After Bao Zheng completed a proper investigation and clarified the problem, he drew his conclusions. Clearly, Bao Zheng, in either *jingju* or *Yuan zaju*, was an intelligent man. However, the intelligence of Bao Zheng in *A Great Case of Injustice* was to a larger extent built on the legal concepts such as investigation, evidence, etc.

Another important characteristic of *A Great Case of Injustice* is that the playwright created the image of Chang Jingan. Chang Jingan was called Chang *qingtian*. The term *qingtian* means “honest and upright official”. When the two murders happened, he went to investigate at once. However, Chang Jingan judged wrongly again and again. Why did an “honest and upright official” also cause injustice? The play involved an important aspect of the legal system.

According to the criminal law of the Qing Dynasty, cases of capital punishment should be finally judged by three authorities: *dalisi* (the Supreme Court), *duchayuan* (the Supreme Procuratorate) and *xingbu* (the Supreme Judicial Office). In August of every year, the three authorities would finally judge cases sent from different

provinces. After the final judgment, these cases should be reported to the Emperor for final examination.³⁹

In addition, the government also established the role of *Xun an guan* (inspector). The nature of inspector, in some ways, resembled the Swedish “Justiteombudsman” (J.O.).⁴⁰ The role of inspector originated from the Tang Dynasty, and passed on from dynasty to dynasty. They were appointed by the Emperor to investigate officials and inspect disaster areas, and ordinary people had the rights to stop an inspector’s sedan to bring in a case. The role of Bao Zheng in *A Great Case of Injustice* was as an inspector.

Though there was a strict judicial system with three large authorities in the central government, wrongful judgments often occurred at the prefecture and county level.⁴¹ The problem was that these magistrates were also judges. Their duties included arrest, judgment and so on. Everything depended on them but there was no defence counsel.

Furthermore, these magistrates obtained their posts by passing imperial examinations, but the contents of examinations were mostly based on Confucian

³⁹ Dai Yi, *Qianlongdi jiqi shidai (Emperor Qianlong and his time)*, Beijing: Renmin Daxue Chubanshe, 1997, p. 124.

⁴⁰ As early as 1809, the Swedish Parliament introduced a scheme to safeguard the interest of the individual. A parliamentary committee appointed a person who is suitably qualified to investigate private grievances against the State. The official title of the person is “Justiteombudsman”. He investigates complaints large and small came to him from all levels of society. (See Alexander, L. G., *New Concept English*. Hefei: Anhui Kexuejishu Chubanshe, 1989, vol. 3, p.195.) In China, inspector in Tang was called *Ancha shi*.

⁴¹ Even though judicial inspectors could solve some of the wrongly judged cases, in ancient China, with simple transportation and lack of modern communication technology, these judicial inspector could only settle a limited number of cases.

scriptures, which had nothing to do with the criminal law. Therefore, they would be hardly competent at judgment. *A Great Case of Injustice* showed exactly this problem. The playwright pointed out Chang Jingan's pedant, bookish and naive judgment, however good his intentions: "You study Confucian scriptures but cannot judge cases". Others examples are Jiang Wangli in *Tan yinshan (Reaching Hell)*, and Zhao Lian in *Shuang yǔzhūo (A Pair of Jade Bracelets)*. They are also like Chang Jingan. Judges, however wise or eminent, are human and can make mistakes. However, these plays are not about such mistakes. They criticized the inadequacy of the education system and legal system. These were issues that the Yuan playwrights had never dealt with.

Bao Zheng plays in *Yuan zaju* and in *jingju* had two different themes. The target of the Yuan playwrights' criticisms was corrupt officials. The makers of wrongful judgments only wanted money and detested the truth and law.⁴² The view of playwrights of *jingju* seemed more profound and far-reaching. Even though corrupt officials were sources of unjust verdicts, they knew that unjust verdicts would not cease even if there was no corruption. *A Great Case of Injustice*, *Reaching Hell* and other plays revealed that what the government officials had learnt was inadequate for the responsibility of their positions. This was also a source of unjust verdicts.

⁴² For example, in *Huilan ji (The Story of a Chalk Circle)* of *Yuan zaju*, the judge of Zhengzhou, Su Shun said when he first arrived on stage, "Although I am a government official, yet I have no knowledge of the law. If you bribe me with money, and you can win your case."

6.4 The Ordinary Person and the Insignificant Person as the Leading Role

While questioning honest officials and the traditional education system, a new creative trend emerged. This new trend no longer harbored illusions about “honest officials”, but praised the actions of ordinary people or in their own defence. The leading role was no longer the judge, but ordinary people or insignificant so lowly people.

Of some of the more successful plays, *A Pair of Jade Bracelets* is a good example. The play is also called *Famen si* (*The Famen Temple*), which was created by well-known playwright Lu Shengkui. The story is of Fu Peng, a scholar, who went to the Sun family, chicken-seller, to purchase chickens. He was attracted by the daughter, Sun Yüjiao, so he left a jade bracelet at the Sun family’s house. Sun Yüjiao liked the bracelet and loved Fu Peng. The scene was noted by a matchmaker, Liu Hu Shi. She recommended herself as their go-between. Sun Yüjiao was at the sexually awakened age, and the warm feelings that she experienced made her give an embroidered shoe to Liu Hu Shi to deliver to Fu Peng as a token of love. The embroidered shoe was discovered by Liu Hu Shi’s son Liu Biao. After Liu Biao asked his mother the details, he stole the shoe, hoping to blackmail Fu Peng and rape Sun Yüjiao. However, not only was he unsuccessful in blackmailing Fu Peng, he was also insulted by the slaves of the Fu family.

After matchmaker Liu Hu Shi took the embroidered shoe, Sun Yǔjiao waited eagerly for a response. Coincidentally, her uncle and aunt came to live in her house temporarily. On that night, Liu Biao sneaked into Sun Yǔjiao's room to rape her. He saw a couple on the bed in the dark, and he assumed that the couple was Fu Peng and Sun Yǔjiao, so he killed them and cut off the woman's head. Liu Biao had always had some misunderstandings with his Uncle Liu Gongdao, so he threw the woman's head into his uncle's courtyard in order to make some trouble for him. Liu Gongdao was enraged when he saw the head. Liu Gongdao dumped the head into the well of the courtyard, and then told a young boy servant, Song Xinger, to add sand to eliminate any trace. Liu Gongdao was afraid that Song Xinger would expose this secret. Therefore, he killed Song Xinger and threw his body into the well as well.

The Sun family reported the murder to the authorities. The judge, Zhao Lian, concluded that this case involved an illicit sexual relationship, based on Sun Yǔjiao's jade bracelet. He thus arrested Yǔjiao and Fu Peng. Liu Gongdao was afraid that the Song family might come to take Song Xinger home; therefore, Liu Gongdao reported to the magistrate that Song Xinger stole his goods and escaped. Zhao Lian suspected that Song Xinger was the murderer. Thus, he called upon Song Xinger's sister Song Qiaojiao.

The play fully highlighted Song Qiaojiao's intelligence. When Song Qiaojiao was implicated in the murder case and was confronted in the courtroom, the judge Zhao

Lian pointed out that Song Xinger murdered two people in the Sun family, and then he stole goods from Liu Gongdao's family and escaped. Song Qiaojiao immediately rebutted, "Song Xinger is still a young boy, how could he kill two people? If he had taken two lives, why did he still steal goods instead of running away? On the other hand, if he had stolen goods, why did he go to the Sun family to murder people?"⁴³ Her words made Zhao Lian speechless. When Zhao Lian put Song Qiaojiao in jail, she asked for the details of the case from Sun Yüjiao, and she believed that the source of this murder must come from the matchmaker Liu Hu Shi. Thus, further interrogation of Liu Hu Shi would lead to the true murderer. After listening to Fu Peng's story, she deduced that the murderer must be Liu Hu Shi's son, Liu Biao. She asked Fu Peng to write a complaint for her. All of these revealed Song Qiaojiao's intelligence, capability, indicating her importance in the investigation of the case.

More importantly, the play demonstrated Song Qiaojiao's unyielding will. Although Song Qiaojiao was only fifteen at the time, yet she was decisive, unafraid of difficulties, and unwilling to cease pleading an unjust case until it was rightfully determined. After Song Qiaojiao was released, she and Fu Peng's mother prepared to petition the superiors of the judge for a new trial. When they arrived at the capital city, Song Qiaojiao learnt that the Empress Dowager and her adopted son, Liu Jin, the Chief Eunuch, would visit the Famen Temple to worship. Song Qiaojiao waited near by for several days. When Song Guoshi, Song Qiaojiao's father, was

⁴³Liu Liemao, Su Huanzhong and Guo Jingrui ed., *Che Wang Fu quben jinghua liuce* (*The Essence of Che Wang Fu Repertoire six volumes*), Guangzhou: Zhongshan Daxue Chubanshe, 1991, vol. 4, p.

threatened by the Empress Dowager's honour guards on their arrival, he advised his daughter not to seek justice. Song Qiaojiao said, "Father, you do not have to approach them, allow your daughter to seek justice."⁴⁴ Song Qiaojiao recounted the details of the case, thus winning a chance of retrial.⁴⁵

Whether in the arrangement of characters or the structure, the whole play aimed to highlight the "unimportant person", Song Qiaojiao. Judge Zhao Lian's foolishness sets off the intelligence of Song Qiaojiao, while the awe-inspiring Empress contrasts with Song Qiaojiao's unyielding spirit in seeking justice.

A Pair of Jade Bracelets is not a sheer fabrication. In the late Qing Dynasty, Yang Naiwu, a scholar in Jiangsu Province, had a secret affection for a young woman Xiao Baicai. Due to this secret affection, Yang Naiwu was wrongfully accused of murder, thrown into prison and tortured until he confessed. Thus the truth of the case was not unraveled. Yang Naiwu's sister Yang Shuying went to Beijing to seek justice. After numerous struggles, this case ultimately led to the dismissal of many government officials from their posts. This factual event was later arranged into the theatrical performance of *Yang Naiwu and Xiao Baicai*. In this case, Yang Shuying was "a completely insignificant person" but played an important part.

249.

⁴⁴ Ibid. p. 262.

⁴⁵ After Song Qiaojiao won a chance of retrial, the Chief Eunuch Liu Jin ordered Zhao Lian to solve the case within three days. Accorded to Song Qiaojiao's recounting, Zhao Lian arrested Liuhu Shi and her son Liu Biao. The case was finally solved, and Liu Biao and Liu Gongdao were put to death.

Another play, *Si jinshi (Four Officials)*, has a similar theme. The play began when Yang Suzen's husband was murdered and she was sold to a merchant. A helpless and weak woman normally would be incapable of bringing a lawsuit. When Song Shijie heard of Yang Suzen's bitter experience, he, using the title of Yang Suzen's adoptive father, brought in a lawsuit for Yang. He began investigating the circumstances and collecting background information surrounding this case. Song Shijie was unafraid of punishment, nor yielded to the threat of being sent away to a distant place for penal service, consequently he was able to win the case.

In the traditional courtroom play, to take the leading role from the upright official and give it to an "ordinary people" meant the status of upright and honourable officials had been taken over by a humble servant. Whether it was Song Qiaojiao in *A Pair of Jade Bracelets* or Song Shijie in *Four Officials*, both experienced tremendous hardships. They relentlessly appealed for redress of their misjudged cases until the murderer was caught. What playwrights wanted to praise is this kind of ordinary person who could use the law to seek justice. These characters showed a persistent and undaunting spirit in appealing for redress of injustice; Nietzsche called such a spirit, 'the spirit of the wine god'. It was a release of a human being's greatest energy; it inspired the struggle for the dignity of the human being.

More important is that in the plays we see evidence of new legal concepts, which the playwrights advocated. Approximately forty years before the new laws promulgated by the Qing government, popular *xiqu* playwrights and *jingju* playwrights already

presented their new legal concepts on the stage. For example, in *A Pair of Jade Bracelets* the master Liu Gongdao killed his servant Song Xing-er. According to the law, Liu Gongdao was to be punished by beating and paying compensation for funeral expenses. However, in the play, Liu Gongdao was sentenced to death. According to the playwright, murderers must be executed, and the law should not distinguish between the noble and the lowly.

In the Qing Dynasty, when an ordinary person lodged a complaint against a provincial official, even if he won the case, he was still be sent to a distant place for penal service. However, in the play *Four Officials*, not only did Song Shijie win the case against two provincial officials and one county level official, but he was set free. Mao Peng awarded Song Shijie a certificate and put on a big red flower for him. Even Song Shijie himself admitted that he should be sentenced to death in accordance to the law. Why was Song Shijie who helped his adopted daughter, a weak woman, in seeking justice, expecting to be punished? This is the question raised by the playwright, not because the playwright had little understanding of the law, but because the playwright wanted to clearly and deliberately deal with this issue in the play. The treatment of the plot was also idealistic, reflecting the idealistic views of the playwright.

Playwrights applied these new, idealistic legal concepts not only to common people but also to the highest in the land. In the *Yuan zaju* play *Selling Rice at Chenzhou*, the corrupt official Liu Ya-nei was beaten to death by a gold mace granted by the

Emperor. The gold mace was a symbol of power in the play. However, this special execution tool or weapon was given a new meaning in the works of popular *xiqu* playwrights. It could be used to hit emperor if he violated the laws. In modern times when a President violates the law, he is judged in a special court. Popular *xiqu* playwrights of the Qing Dynasty obviously had foreknowledge of modern laws, but they were seeking ways of limiting imperial power. Bao Zheng and courtroom plays thus developed from morality plays to plays about the law.

6.5 Conclusion

The masterpieces of the Bao Zheng plays and courtroom plays in *Yuan zaju* and in *jingju*, were not simple accounts of criminal cases, but touched on some of the important social issues of their time. This was their common feature. However, there were different features between the two since they were the products of different times.

Bao Zheng in *Yuan zaju* was created at a time when the law contained elements of racial discrimination. Playwrights of the Yuan, who often despised the law, used the traditional Chinese moral concept of *tianli* as a theoretical base to express their dissatisfaction towards reality. Under the Yuan playwrights' pen, Bao Zheng frequently used extra-legal methods to punish evil forces. These extra-legal methods revealed the playwrights' idea of justice, and were well received by the audience.

With the overthrow of Yuan Dynasty, elements of racial discrimination in the law were abolished. Qing playwrights mainly had to confront the common drawback of traditional moral codes, which provided different legal punishments for criminals of different family and social status. Such inequitable laws were made under the guidance of Confucianism and *lixue*'s hierarchy and moral concepts

The function of literature and the conscience of playwrights lay in continuously discovering and raising new issues. During the Qing Dynasty, if playwrights still used the traditional moral concepts to attack the law, they would just be supporting the inequalities of the law. Therefore, in *jingju* plays, playwrights used idealised laws to attack the inequitable laws of reality, and also exhibited a creative idea of equality before the law. This idea had greater historical significance with the social reforms of the late Qing and the administering of new laws in the early of twentieth century.

Jingju enriched the image of Bao Zheng. Between law and family members, between law and royal family member, and between imperial power and personal consideration, playwrights not only portrayed Bao Zheng's fierce mental struggle, but also demonstrated an impartial prosecutor's final choice. At the same time, when playwrights tried to show Bao Zheng's intelligence, capability, his earnest working spirit and his conscientious pursuit of investigation, they emphasised that all of these relied on legal procedures. Thus Bao Zheng plays became courtroom plays that embodied more defined legal significance.

In the late-Qing, as the malady of the imperial examination system grew clearer by day, the traditional education system and legal system were also called in question. *Jingju* playwrights, from a different angle, reflected that the traditional education system was divorced from the legal system, and demonstrated the malpractice of appointing officials who had no knowledge of the field they were practicing.

Consequently, a new creative trend arouses. It no longer sought to rely on honest and upright officials, but to praise unimportant people's important role in the process of appealing for redress of wrongs. It indicated that these people strove to protect their dignity. In this way, Bao Zheng plays reached new heights.

Chapter Seven

The Frontier Fortress Play: Play of the Yang Family

Generals

War and Peace

7.0 Introduction

In Chinese literature, works about wars between nationalities are called *biansai wenxue* (literature of the frontier fortress). Poetry about such wars is termed frontier fortress poetry, and *xiqu* are called frontier fortress plays.

Plays about *Yangjia jiang* (*The Yang Family Generals*) belong to the genre of frontier fortress plays. These plays describe Yang Ye (? -986)¹, a famous general of the Northern Song Dynasty (960-1126), and his family's heroic deeds in their defence of China against the Khitan Liao. Yang Ye, his eldest son, Yang Yanlang, and grandson, Yang Wenguang, are given biographies in the standard history of the Song, *Songshi* (*The History of the Song Dynasty*).

Three generations of the Yang family all produced famous generals, and accounts of many of their heroic deeds were widespread throughout the North Song

Dynasty. Later, these deeds, exaggerated and reshaped in theatres and storytelling,² became the subject of novels about the Yang generals: *Yangjia jiang yanyi* (*The Romance of the Yang Family Generals*), *Yangjiafu yanyi* (*The Romance of the Yang Family Mansion*) and *Bei Song zhizhuan* (*The Biography of the Northern Song*).

In the reign of Qianlong, these novels were rearranged as *xiqu* in the form of *chuanqi* sequence for the Court Theatre, consisting of a total of ten volumes and divided into two hundred and forty scenes.³ From the mid-Qing Dynasty on, over about one hundred years, this *xiqu* sequence was performed four times in the imperial court. In the late-Qing, Grand Empress Cixi (1835-1908) once ordered this sequence of *chuanqi* to be rearranged into *jingju*. From 1888 to 1900, a total of one hundred and five scenes of the Yang Family General were rearranged into *jingju* and this work only stopped due to “the Boxers Rebellion”.

Due to its grand scale, common people hardly ever saw the whole sequence, but as early as the reign of Emperor Daoguang, most of its brilliant stories had been performed by regional theatre troupes.⁴ Though Grand Empress Cixi’s group was

¹ See Tuo Tuo, *Songshi* (*The History of the Song Dynasty*). 10 vols. Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1972. pp. 9303-06.

² These stories included the Yuan and Ming Dynasties’ plays: *Badawang kaizhao jiuzhong* (*The Eighth Prince Saves the Loyal Generals*), *Po tianmen zhen* (*Defeat at the Battle of Tianmen*), etc.

³ Shanghai Yishu Yanjiusuo (Shanghai Institute of Art Research) and Zhongguo Xiqujia Xiehui Shanghai Fenhui (Association of Chinese Theatre Artists, Shanghai Branch), eds. *Zhongguo xiqu quyī cidian* (*Dictionary of Chinese Xiqu and Chinese Folk Art Forms*). Shanghai: Shanghai Cishu Chubanshe, 1985, p. 534.

⁴ See *Daoguang sinian qingshengban jumu* (*Qingsheng Troup’s List of Xiqu in the Reign of 4th Years of Daoguang*). See Zhou Mingtai *Daoxian yilai liyuan xinian xiaolu* (*Theatrical Information from the Reigns of Daoguan and Xianfeng onwards*). Shanghai: 1932. no. 3. pp. 3-6.

unable to complete the rearrangement work, yet prior to Grand Empress Cixi's order for rearrangements, *jingju* playwrights had, on the basis of novels, created many plays about the Yang family generals. These plays could be performed alone or combined together to form a sequence.

The Yang Family Generals of jingju can be divided into two sections. The main character in the first section is Yang Ye, who, with his sons, rendered the imperial Song family great service in resisting the Kitan Liao to the north. The main character in the second section is Yang Ye's wife, She Caihua, who led widows of the Yang family in a continuous struggle against the enemy after the deaths of most of the Yang generals.

From the 1950s, commentaries on these were always focused on the first section. Some of the masterpieces in the second section, *Silang tanmu* (*Yang Yanhui Visits his Mother*) and *Yanmen guan* (*Yanmen Gate*), were not performed for forty years,⁵ and as a result the theme of the plays of the Yang family generals remains unknown.

⁵ Since the Qing Dynasty, *Yang Yanhui Visits his Mother* and *Yanmen Gate* had made the *xiqu* fashionable for a long period of time. However, these masterpieces have not been performed since 1950s, but they are being performed again now. Scott, A. C. in his *The Classical Theatre of China* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1957) says, "Today it is not performed because, according to the authorities, it is no longer wanted by theater goers. This means presumably that authority has decreed this to be so, the reason being according to official pronouncement that 'the play projects a concept of personal virtue that is quite compatible with attachment to alien rulers against one's own people. Both performers and audiences now see that this is a harmful distortion of the proper relation between public duty and personal sentiment, so they no longer like the play.'" p. 208.

The present chapter seeks to explore the content and themes of the play of Yang family generals, using the series of plays that were actually performed outside the imperial court. This chapter is divided into two parts. The first part concerns the subject of frontier war. The second part depicts the themes of peace. It includes plays of female Yang generals, backgrounds to wars and reconciliation between nationalities from the Song Dynasty to the Qing, the subjects of peace and unity between nationalities as reflected in theatrical plays and the differences between novels and plays, and the breakthrough in themes.

Two terms - “nationality” and “ethnic” are used in this chapter. I refer to the Khitan, Mongolians and Manchu, Nüzhen as “nationalities” before they became part of China, and as “ethnic groups” afterwards.

7.1 The Theme of the Cruelty of War

7.1.1 Historical Background

The Song Dynasty was a highly creative but also a fiercely violent period. Science and technology flourished and made spectacular progress. Of the four great inventions of ancient China, papermaking, compass, printing technique and gunpowder weapons, three were achieved in the Song Dynasty. However, the Song Dynasty was also a dynasty beset by a constant fear of war.

The nation that was hostile to the Song was the Liao. The ancestors of the Liao nation were the Khitan tribes of Eastern Hu who were nomads inhabiting the upper ranges of the Liao River (now in Jilin Province) ever since the period of the Northern Wei (386-534). They settled in the Songmo Prefecture in the Tang period (618-907). An early Tang Emperor appointed the leader of the Khitan tribes as the head of the Songmo prefecture. In the later Tang, Ah Baoji, the leader of the Diela, the strongest of the Khitan tribes, unified the Khitan and their neighboring tribes, and established the Liao Dynasty (916-1125), which existed concurrently with the Five Dynasties and the Northern Song.

During the Five Dynasties (907-960), China lost sixteen of its northern prefectures to the Khitan Liao. The early Song emperors tried to regain the area and in 986 mounted a full-scale operation to this end.⁶ Song troops were sent along three routes: East, West and the Middle, with Pan Mei in charge of the West and Yang Ye and Wang Xian his deputies. Yang Ye recovered four prefectures. The troops on the East and the Middle routes also recaptured some lost territories.

The Khitan sent out an enormous force to counterattack. Yang Ye was ordered to withdraw. He presented Pan Mei with a plan to protect the common people from being massacred by the Khitan during the withdrawal, which involved waiting while a part of army held off the Khitan troops to allow the common people to escape. Wang Xian opposed this plan, advocating immediate withdrawal

accompanied by drums, accusing Yang Ye of cowardice, to which Yang Ye reacted by leading his troops into the Chenjia Valley, with Pan and Wang's promise of reinforcements at the entrance in case of emergency. Once the battle had begun, Wang sent an observer to an overlooking mountain, who sent a message that the Khitan Liao was losing. In the hope of winning a greater share of the credit in the eyes of the emperor, Wang then withdrew from the entrance of Chenjia Valley, possibly to attack on another front, abandoning Yang, despite Pan Mei's attempts to prevent him. Soon afterwards it was learned that Yang had been defeated after all, his son, Yanyu, killed in action, and he himself captured. Pan Mei, instead of trying to rescue Yang Ye, withdrew. Yang Ye, seeing that his position was hopeless, starved himself for three days and died. He was about sixty years old.⁷

The wars did not stop. In 1004, the Liao Emperor Shengzong (983-1030) and his mother, Empress Dowager Xiao (953-1009), personally led their troops south, deep into Song territory. The Song Emperor Zhenzong (998-1022) was afraid of the Liao and wanted to move the Song capital further south. But the Prime Minister, Kuo Zhun (961-1023), objected and forced the Emperor to go to Chan, which was near the Song capital, to rally his troops. During the battle, a Song soldier shoot an arrow that killed Xiao Dalin (? -1004), one of the Liao generals in the Liao, severely damaging the morale of the Liao troops. Afraid that the Song armies would attack from the south and the north simultaneously, they were forced

⁶ See Mackerras, Colin P, *The Rise of the Jingju*, London: Oxford University Press, 1972, p. 265.

to offer a peace deal to the Song. The Song Emperor had always been an advocate for peace and so the peace treaty was quickly concluded in January 1005.

According to the peace treaty, the Song would send one hundred thousand silver taels, and two hundred thousand bolts of tough silk to Liao. This peace deal became historically known as the “Alliance of Chanyan” as it was signed in Chanyan Prefecture.

7.1.2 Plays of the Cruel Wars

The first section of the Yang Family General plays was based on these historical facts with many literary and imaginative embellishments. The theme of cruel wars was a feature of *Jing shatan* (*The Golden Sandy Beach*) and *Lianglang shan* (*Lianglang Mountain*).

The Golden Sandy Beach is about the traitor Pan Mei's⁸ collusion with the Liao Dynasty. Tianqing, King of Liao decided to invite the Song emperor to a banquet to discuss the details of the peace deal; but the banquet was a ruse to conceal Tianqing's intention to kill the Song Emperor. Yang Ye discovered this evil plot and ordered his eldest son, Yang Yanping, to disguise himself as the emperor and attend the banquet, while he protected the real emperor on the Mt Wutai. Yang Yanping was guarded by his seven brothers on the way to the Golden Sandy Beach to meet King Tianqing.

⁷ See Tuo Tuo, *Songshi (The History of the Song Dynasty)*. 10 vols. Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1972, pp. 9303-05.

In order to capture the Song emperor, Tianqing prepared an ambush of many soldiers. In this life-and-death battle, King Tianqing was killed by Yang Yanping, who was in turn killed by a long spear. The second son was killed by a short sword, the third son was trampled into mincemeat by horses, and the fourth and eighth sons were captured by the Liao army. The fifth, sixth and seventh sons broke through the tight encirclement and escaped to Mt Wutai to report the event. Yang Ye was stunned and the Emperor appointed the fifth, sixth and seventh sons to office. The fifth son, Yang Yande, did not want to be a government official, and became a monk on Mt Wutai.⁹

In the war of the Golden Sandy Beach, the Yang family had lost five sons. In another campaign, Yang family lost two more members. The play *Lianglang Mountain*,¹⁰ retold the story of Yang Ye's entrapment at the entrance to the Chenjia valley in Mt Lianglang. His seventh son broke through the encircled enemy to seek help from Pan Mei, but he instead was treacherously killed on Pan Mei's order. Without food or reinforcements, Yang Ye committed suicide by knocking himself against the Li Ling stone tablet outside the temple of Su Wu.

Of the nine generals of the Yang family only two survived: the fifth and sixth sons, the fifth becoming a monk. The cruelty of war was graphically illustrated by the

⁸ Pan Mei was also called Pan Renmei.

⁹ The summary includes *Jin shatan* (*The Golden Sandy Beach*) and *Wulang chujia* (*The Fifth Son Became a Monk*.)

¹⁰ The play was also named *Peng bei* (*Knock Against the Stone Tablet*).

deaths of most of the Yang family and their troops. The spirit of sacrificing one's life for the motherland also makes these plays heroic and tragic.

7.2 The Theme of Peace

The second main theme of the Yang Family Generals sequence is the preservation of peace. These plays featured the women of the Yang family, who were great generals in their own right, contributing to the stabilization of China and the establishment of peace. The progressive development of multiculturalism from the Song to the Qing eras was achieved in two ways: the blending of cultures as conquerors and conquered learned to live together, and the blending of nationalities and bloodlines through intermarriage. The two plays to be discussed here, *Yang Yanhui Visits his Mother* and *The Yanmen Gate*, feature these aspects of national war and national blending. They focused much more on the theme of peace than the Ming novels on which they were based.

7.2.1 The Military Prowess of the Female Generals of the Yang Family

The female generals of the Yang family in the *xiqu* sequence include Yang Ye's wife She Caihua, Yang Ye's eight daughters-in-law and a grand daughter-in-law Mu Guiying. Everyone is brave and skilful in battle. In the Yang mansion, even maids excelled in military arts.

The plays *Paifeng dagun* (*Paifeng Demonstrates her Martial arts skills*) and *Yan huogun* (*Showing the Cooking Rod*) were about a servant girl Yang Paifeng. The Commanding General of the Song army, Yang Yanzhao was caught by the Liao army. General Meng Liang came to the Yang mansion to seek help to rescue Yang Yanzhao. The servant girl Yang Paifeng volunteered but Meng Liang belittled her skills, and so they had a kung-fu competition. Yang Paifeng utterly routed Meng Liang with a bamboo cooking staff. Therefore, She Caihua, Yang Yanzhao's mother, allowed Yang Paifeng to join Meng Liang to save their master.

When Meng Liang and Yang Paifeng arrived at the military camp, General Jiao Zan, Meng Liang's colleague, refused to accept her as an equal. He made a bet with Meng Liang that if he lost a kung-fu competition with Yang Paifeng, he would kneel down and call her "my mother".¹¹ Yang Paifeng, using her astonishing skills with the cooking staff defeated Jiao, and made him kneel to her and call her "mother".

If a servant girl is so heroic, we can imagine the kung-fu skills of the other female generals. The most brilliant of the female generals were She Caihua and Mu Guiying. She Caihua, Mu Guiying's grandmother-in-law, loved her husband Yang Ye so much that even after he died she remained dedicated to the Yang family and was able to become a general at a hundred years of age.

¹¹ In Chinese traditional culture, the term of "my mother" implies great respect. In this play, the playwright has used this great respect in a humorous tone to create comical atmosphere.

She Caihua was the daughter of the Tang King, She Biao, and lived in the She Tang Gate. She Caihua was first betrothed to Yang Ye, the son of the Hushan King, Yang Gun. Then she was betrothed to the son of the Guoshan King Sun Tong. At the time of mid-autumn festival, the two families, the Yang's and Sun's, came to the She Tang Gate to claim their bride. There were two bridegrooms but only one bride, so naturally Yang Gun and Sun Tong began to argue. Therefore, a kung-fu competition occurred. She Caihua fought and won against Yang Ye. Yang escaped to the Temple of Seven-Stars, with her in hot pursuit. He captured her by a trick and having made her swear to marry into the Yang family, they were married forthwith.¹²

She Caihua's marriage began with fighting, and her military skills surpassed Yang Ye's. Their granddaughter-in-law, Mu Guiying also surpassed the skills of their grandson, Yang Zhongbao. The female generals of the Yang family were all great warriors. When most of the Yang family's males had lost their lives in battle, the responsibility of defending the Song was laid upon the women. These women featured in many of the plays of the second section of the sequence as the saviors of the Song, continuously defending the borders against attack.

Though these characters are not real historical figures, their appearances were inspired by a historical figure, Liang Hongyu, who was a Song heroine that was well versed in both polite letters and martial arts. Together with her husband, she

¹² See the "*Che Wang Fu Repertoire*", the play *Shetang guan* (*The Shetang Gate*) and *Qixing miao* (*The Temple of Seven Stars*).

staunchly resisted all invaders, and was granted a title of *An guo furen* (Madame of Defending Our Country).¹³ She Caihua and Mu Guiyin in plays of the Yang family generals were exactly like Liang Hongyu. In order to further understand these characters, an outline of national war and national integration since the Song Dynasty is necessary.

7.2.2 National War and National Integration

The history of China since the Song Dynasty, to a large extent, was a history of national war and blending. People of different nationalities hostile to each other in war, mixed and accepted each other when the wars were over. Different nationalities began to live together and gradually formed one nation of different ethnic groups.

National War

Throughout Chinese history, even the most powerful dynasties, such as the Han and the Tang, were unable to extinguish the flames of war on the borders. However, the Han and the Tang both had a relatively strong national defence capability. After the Tang Dynasty, China was constantly at war with the nomadic people in the North. When the founding Song Emperor Zhao Kuangyin first established his power, he weakened the power of military generals in order to

¹³ Tuo Tuo, *Songshi (The History of the Song Dynasty)*. 10 vols. Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1972, p. 11365.

prevent internal power struggles. The policy that favoured civil officials more than military generals weakened the national defence, and consequently, created possibilities for nomadic tribes to invade China and begin to play important roles, even to the point of becoming the ultimate ruler.

After the Khitan Liao acquired sixteen northern prefectures of China and signed the “Alliance of Chanyan” peace deal, China had twenty years of peace, free from foreign intrusions. However, peace did not last long. At the time, another more powerful nationality, the Nüzhen nationality that founded the Jin Dynasty, was on the rise. The Nüzhen were the direct ancestors of the Manchu. In 1125, the Nüzhen exterminated the Khitan Liao, and in 1126, occupied Northern China, and eyed the Southern Song. In order to ensure the peace of the border, the ruler of the Jin Dynasty cruelly slaughtered the neighbouring Mongolians. “Every three years, the government would send troops to plunder and slaughter, they called this exterminating the men of Mongolia.”¹⁴

These cruel invasions and persecutions finally evoked strong opposition by the Mongolians. In 1211, Genghis Khan devoted the nation’s full power and began expansion against the Jin, forcing the Nüzhen to retreat in every battle. In 1234, the Mongolians formed an alliance with the Han and exterminated the Jin. After the Mongolians overthrew the Jin Dynasty, they also occupied land north of China’s Yangtse River. In 1271, they established the Yuan Dynasty, and

¹⁴ Zhao Yi, *Yuechen Xizihu (The Moon Sink into the Xizi Lake)*. Nanjing: Jiangsu Renmin Chubanshe, 1995, p. 254.

exterminated the Southern Song Dynasty in 1279, thus united the whole of China, and set Dadu (now Beijing) as the capital city. At the time, Mongolian troops also occupied a large area of Europe and Asia, establishing an unprecedented powerful Mongolian Empire. This Empire was known to the West due to the Italian traveler Marco Polo and his work, *Voyages and Travels of Marco Polo*. Colombo and Magellan traveled across oceans, opened new sea routes, in search for this distant Eastern Empire.

The Mongolians, having suffered years of slaughter by the Nüzhen, found the greatest release of their oppressed feelings in the process of building the Mongolian Empire. Genghis Khan's military talent was brought into full play during the war, while the Mongolian troops also found opportunity to demonstrate and develop their military capability. The war gave the Mongolian Empire the greatest material benefits, but inflicted terrible suffering on the other nations. Genghis Khan and his descendants did not truly understand that massacre was not solution. In 1368, the Yuan Dynasty was overthrown. The powerful Mongolian Empire was replaced by the Ming Dynasty established by Zhu Yuanzhang. The Ming Dynasty lasted for 276 years.

During this time, the remaining people of the Nüzhen nationality, after the extermination of the Jin Dynasty, experienced more than three hundred years of growth and gradually formed a powerful new nationality – the Manchu. In 1616, the Manchu established the Late Jin state, and in 1636, changed the title of the reigning dynasty to Qing. In 1644, they re-entered the Han territory and

established the Qing Empire, which continued for approximately three hundred years. The above describes the wars between different nationalities in China from the tenth century to the sixteenth century, and the consequent change of dynasties.

Integration of Nationalities

It was war that changed and blended different nationalities, and subsequently formed a new multi-cultural nation. The Khitan, the Nüzhen, the Mongolians and the Manchu successively obtained governing power via military force and war. However, the result of war was that these nationalities also became new members of a large family of nationalities, and thus created a greater multicultural entity called China.

Every national group intends to preserve its tradition. For example, after the Nüzhen established the Jin Dynasty in China's north, in order to preserve Nüzhen traditions, the Jin government carried out a series of policies that prohibited Nüzhen people from wearing Han clothes. Emperor Shizong repeatedly emphasised the need to never forget their origin. He once said with great emotion, I really wanted to lead my children back to my hometown, so that my children can see Nüzhen traditions and be able to retain them.¹⁵

¹⁵ See Feng Tianyu, He Xiaoming and Zhou Jiming. *Zhongguo wenhuashi (The History of Chinese Culture)*. Shanghai: Shanghai Renming Chubanshe, 1994, p. 725.

On the other hand, any new coming nationality that entered the Han territory would try very hard to absorb Han culture in strengthening their own culture, in order to adapt to the new environment and facilitate the government of the country. This resulted in a reconciliation of different cultures from various ethnic groups.

During the Liao Dynasty, the Liao had to govern the Han, Mongolians, Huigu, Nüzhen and other ethnic groups. This multicultural structure allowed the Liao Dynasty to “govern the whole country using Khitan rules but using Han rules to govern the Han people.”¹⁶ Soon after the establishment of the Liao, debates about the sacred object of sacrificial rites raged. The government finally decided that Confucianism should be the dominant philosophy to guide the political and cultural development of the Liao Dynasty.¹⁷

During the battles between the Song Dynasty and the Nüzhen, the founder of the Jin Dynasty (1115-1234) told his officials to pay special attention to the search for materials of Han culture. “Once Beijing is conquered, any materials on the subject of ceremony, music and rites of Han culture must all be delivered to the Palace at once.”¹⁸ When ruling north China, the governing system of the Jin Dynasty absorbed the traditional rites and regulations of the Han system. On education, the Jin government emphasized the study of Han culture and introduced the Han

¹⁶ Tuo Tuo. *Liao shi (The History of the Liao Kingdom)*. Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1983, p. 685.

¹⁷ Ibid. p. 1209.

¹⁸ Tuo Tuo. *Jin shi (The History of the Jin Kingdom)*. Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1957, p. 36.

imperial examination system. This allowed Han culture to extend to the people of the Nüzhen nationality.

At the beginning of the Yuan Dynasty (1279-1388), Genghis Khan did not show an interest in the farming culture of the “Central Land”. However, Emperor Kublai welcomed Han culture with an open mind. He surrounded himself with a group of Confucian scholars such as Xu Heng and Hao Jing. Emperor Kublai changed the old customs and urged the practice of Han social structures and systems. Confucian rites and customs were inherited as the main governing system of the country.

The government structure of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) was based on the state system of the Ming Dynasty. Living together with the people of Han nationality, the Manchus gradually changed their original culture practices and attempted to adapt to the cultural practices of Han people, the Manchu’s practice of marriages between close relatives, and their practice of live people being buried together with the dead, were all abandoned as the Han culture prohibited such practices.

The Han people too, having to living with people of so many different ethnic groups, accepted different national cultures. In music, art, literature and dress, there had always been an interchange of cultures. Huan Chengda, a Song scholar, said, “North Han people have habitually used the customs of the non-Han nationalities for a long time. Their habits are the same as the non-Han

nationalities, particularly in costume.”¹⁹ The non-Han nationalities’ painting also spread in the art circles of Han people. The Song Emperor Zhaoji (1082-1135) even collected many non-Han peoples’ paintings,²⁰ and the so called “*hu sheng*” “*fan yue*” (the music of the non-Han nationalities) were all favourites of the Han people. The Han people accepted the musical instrument the “drum flute” of the Nüzhen nationality. The Ming scholar, Xu Wei noted, “The music of Northern China today, includes the war music of Liao and Jin nationalities. Their sounds are robust tunes of warriors on their horses. Once these tunes spread into China, they were gradually accepted and liked by the Han people.”²¹ In the Qing Dynasty, the Han people were keen on the Manchu’s drum song (*Zidishu*).²²

Different nationalities and ethnic groups learnt strong points from each other to offset their own weaknesses. This mutual absorption and integration not only brought vitality to the ancient Han culture, but would also reduce hostility and misunderstanding between nations. This, in turn, laid a foundation for the multi-ethnic country of the Qing Dynasty.

The other important feature contributing to the multi-ethnic country was intermarriage between the different nationalities. This kind of interconnected relationship was a characteristic of mutual acceptance between nations in the

¹⁹ Fan Chengda, *Lanpeilu (Traveling Notes)*, Quoted from Feng Tianyu. *Zhongguo wenhuashi (The History of Chinese Culture)*. Shanghai: Shanghai Renming Chubanshe, 1994, p. 721.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Xu Wei. *Nanci xulu (Narrate South Xiqu)*. In ZGXLJ, 3. Beijing: Zhongguo Xiju Chubanshe, 1959, vol. 3, p. 240.

²² Guo Jingrui, Chen Weiwu. *Che Wang Fu quben tiyao-Qiyanan (The Preface of Summary of the Che Wang Fu Repertoire)*. Guangzhou: Zhongshan Daxue Chubanshe, 1989, p. 8.

northern part of China. Twice in its history, the bloodlines of the Han nationality were significantly altered by intermarriage with different nations in north China. The first was during the Sui (581-618) and Tang eras (618-907) when even the imperial family was not pure Han. Both Emperor Suiyang and the founding Tang Emperor Li Yuan had Xianbei mothers from a minority people.²³ The second was from the Song to the Qing. The Khitan Liao invaded Northern China during the Northern Song era, but was later conquered by the Nüzhen Jin Dynasty. So the people of the Khitan Liao mingled with Han, Mongolian and Nüzhen nationalities. The Jin was later defeated by the combination of forces from Mongolian and Han people. After the subjugation of Jin Dynasty, in order to avoid the revenge of Mongolians and the Han, about two million Nüzhen people adopted Han names. They practiced Han customs and spoke Han language. Consequently, they became a part of the Han nationality.²⁴ When the Manchu entered China in large numbers and made Beijing their capital, the Han and the Manchu had to live together. Intermarriage with some conditions was allowed. Therefore, the Han nationality that lived in the north was in fact, no longer of pure Han bloodline, and many Mongolians and Manchu were also no longer of pure original bloodline.

The Chang of Relationship between Nationalities

²³ Wang Tongling, *Zhongguo minzu shi (The History of Chinese Nationality)*, Wenhua Xeshe, 1934, p. 322.

²⁴ Song Dexuan, *Manzu zhexue sixiang yanjiu (A Study of Manchu Philosophical Thinking)*. Liaoning: Liaoning Daxue Chubanshe, 1994. p. 17.

As people of different ethnic origins intermarried and lived together, the traditional Han culture and the concept of nationality also changed. The Yuan, Ming and Qing Dynasties were in fact, governed by Mongolian, Han and Manchu respectively. The Yuan government divided people into four large social classes. The Mongolians belonged to the first class. The *semu*²⁵ people, who included ethnic groups living in China's Northwest at the time and Muslims from Arabia and Persia, were classified as the second class. The Han nationalities living in Northern China, Khitan, Nüzhen and Koreans were of the third class, and they were generally called north Han. While the Han nationality living in South, once governed by the Southern-Song government, was the most lowly regarded. South Han was also a general concept that included many different ethnic groups.²⁶ Although this artificial hierarchy caused discrimination between nationalities, it allowed previously hostile nationalities, such as Han, Khitan, Koreans and Nüzhen, to be classified into one social class and created an equal relationship between ethnic groups.

After they paid the high price of blood during the formation of a multinational country, all incorporated nationalities search for equality. In the Qing Dynasty, after the Manchu seized power through military force, they adopted high-handed policies to suppress rebellious sentiments from various ethnic groups. Any scholar

²⁵ During the war, large numbers of Muslims from Arabia, Persia and the Middle East were recruited and came to China. After the war, they formed an Islamic group, who used Han Chinese language, whilst still retained the culture of Arabia and Persia. They were usually called as *Semu* (colored-eyes) people.

²⁶ Zhang Geng and Guo Hancheng, chief eds. *Zhongguo xiqu tongshi* (*A History of Chinese Theatre*). 3 vol. Beijing: Zhongguo Xiju Chubanshe, 1984, vol 1, p 96.

whose work was suspected of being anti-Qing was often sentenced to death, which was the so-called literary inquisition. Many such scholars and officials were sentenced to death, such as Mao Chongzhuo and Xu Tingqing of the Shunzhi period, Zhuang Tinglong and Dai Mingshi of the Kangxi period, Shen Deqian, Xu Shukui, Yin Baoshan and Zhu Tingzheng of the Qianlong period. Each case implicated many people who were executed or sent to distant places for penal services.²⁷ During the Qianlong period, in order to suppress the rebellion of Miao ethnic groups in the south, Qing troops burnt one thousand two hundred and twenty-four Miao stockade villages, and killed more than seventeen thousand Miao people.²⁸

Due to the fierce anti-Qing sentiments, whilst adopting oppressive policies, the Qing government also carried out a series of measures benefiting national unity. The Qing government adopted a policy of “never increase land tax” to avoid resentment from Han and other ethnic groups. On the issue of marriage, the Qing government followed Han customs. To prevent Manchu from forcing Han women to become their concubines, a Manchu had to report to the government in order to marry a Han woman. There was no need to report if a Han man wanted to marry a Manchu girl, and there were also laws that stated Manchu women should not bully and oppress their husbands of Han nationality.²⁹

²⁷ Feng Tianyu, He Xiaoming and Zhou Jiming. *Zhongguo wenhuashi (The History of Chinese Culture)*. Shanghai: Shanghai Renming Chubanshe, 1994, pp. 842-45.

²⁸ Ibid. 841

In the early Qing, which was full of fierce struggles between ethnic groups, there was “a case of Lǚ Liuliang”. Lǚ Liuliang was an advocator for Han nationalism. A Qing scholar, Zeng Jing, once read Lǚ Liuliang’s works by accident; it stirred up his Han nationalism. Therefore, Zeng Jing and his followers attempted to plot rebellion against the Qing. When the event was exposed, Zeng Jing and Zhang Xi were arrested. Emperor Yongzheng was very concerned about this, and conducted a debate with Zeng Jing and Zheng Xi. Emperor Yongzheng had a good command of Han culture. He firstly pointed out the criteria for determining the standards of behaviours of the Emperor was not whether he was a Han or a Manchu. The standard should be set in accordance with Confucianism, and the one that was virtuous should become the Emperor. Then Emperor Yongzheng quoted the classics to state that the ancestors of Chinese were of different tribes. They united together over a long period and became a multinational country. Furthermore, Emperor Yongzheng also asserted that during the few decades after the Manchu entered the “Central Plain”, they already established a country with “no wars at the borders, peace and happiness”.³⁰ When Zeng Jing and Zhang Xi recognised, through this debate, that the Manchu had actually become a new member of Chinese and the Emperors of Qing also strove to build a multinational country, they admitted defeat.

²⁹ Liu Liemao and Guo Jingrui eds. *Che Wang Fu quben xuan-Qianyan (The Preface of Selected Works from the Che Wang Fu Repertoire)*. Guangzhou: Zhongshan Daxue Chubanshe, 1990. p. 9.

³⁰ Feng Tianyu, He Xiaoming and Zhou Jiming. *Zhongguo wenhuashi (The History of Chinese Culture)*. Shanghai: Shanghai Renming Chubanshe, 1994, p. 438.

This debate indicated a change. The traditional treatment of Manchu as an enemy nationality gradually turned into an internal struggle between different ethnic groups. How to identify this change also became a new topic of exploration for thinkers and *literati* of the Qing Dynasty. The plays of Yang family generals contained under the special background of the Qing Dynasty the playwrights' new understanding of relationships between nationalities.

7.2.3 The Theme of War and Peace in Literature

This new understanding is to seek peace in war, and to seek equality between nationalities. The themes of peace were featured in the mid-Qing *xiqu*, which were based on the Ming novel. This emphasis was clearly reflected in the *jingju* *Yang Yanhui Visits his Mother* and *The Yanmen Gate*, which will be discussed below.

Yang Yanhui Visits His Mother and The Yanmen Gate

Yang Yanhui Visits His Mother is a story about Yang Yanhui. In the fatal battle at *Jin shatan*, Yang Ye's fourth son, Yang Yanhui, was captured by the Liao. He was so handsome that he won the heart of the Liao Empress Dowager, Xiao, who even condescended to arrange the marriage of her beautiful daughter, the Princess of the Iron Mirror (Bilian) to the captive.

Yang Yanhui lived incognito in the Liao palace for fifteen years until one day he learned of his mother and brother's expedition to the north to fight against his

adopted country. At the thought of their being so near and yet so inaccessible, he could not help lamenting his fate. The play opens at this point, when his feelings were discovered by the Princess, who continued inquiring until she found out that he wanted to visit his family. The Princess decided to trick her mother into giving her the Mandate Arrow, the symbol of power, with which the bearer can cross the border without obstruction. In the presence of the Empress Dowager, she pinched the child in her arms. Its painful cry made the old lady curious. When questioned, the Princess said that the child wanted to play with its grandmother's royal Mandate Arrow, which was forbidden by the death penalty. Like any indulgent grandmother, the Empress Dowager ordered the law to be set aside and the child was given the Arrow, but with instructions that it must be returned before daybreak.

With the Arrow, Yang Yanhui hurriedly crossed the border but was captured as a Liao spy. His captor, Yang Zongbao, a young lieutenant on sentry duty, was his fourteen-year-old nephew. He was immediately taken to General Yang Yanzhao, his brother. No sooner had the latter discovered the identity of the captive, than he shared his joy with the rest of his family by taking Yang Yanhui to the inner camp to meet his mother, sister and supposed widow.

The happy reunion was a very short one. It was past midnight when Yanhui remembered the oath he had made to the Princess that he would return before dawn. In the midst of great pleading by his family, a heart-broken parting ensued. But alas, he returned too late! The Liao prepared to arrest him on the order of the

Empress Dowager who had discovered her daughter's trick. He would have been executed had the Princess not played another clever trick on the old lady. She recollected how she had obtained the Arrow through the darling child, so she again used her child to procure her husband's release. She threw the child into her mother's arms and pretended to commit suicide by the sword. The mother was again deceived and Yanhui was released. Almost immediately, the solemn atmosphere was changed into one of lightness and gaiety by the mischievous Princess' three graceful "all the best for you" wishes to appease the still dissatisfied mother.³¹

Yang Yanhui Visits his Mother had already been performed on stage before 1824.³²

Later, the play was rearranged by Zhang Erkui (1814-1860) and performed by his Shuangkui Troupe.³³ It made a great stir and became a masterpiece of *jingju*.

Zhang Erkui's ancestral home was Hebei Province. When he was young, he followed his relative to Beijing to enter into business. Later, he became a low-

³¹ A part of the summary of the *Yang Yanhui Visits his Mother* consult Zung, Cecilia S. L. *Secrets of the Chinese Play*, London: George G. Harrap & Co., Ltd, 1937, pp. 287-90. About *Yang Yanhui Visits his Mother*, A. C. Scott's *The Classical Theatre of China* has a different ending. "In the end, of course, the Empress Dowager relents and Si Lang (Yang Yanhui) is reprieved but ordered to take charge of a far Northern outpost where he will no longer be in danger of temptation. The play closes with Si Lang mounting his horse to set forth on this journey." (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, p. 218) This is not the ending of the original script of the Qing Dynasty,

³² See *Daoguang sinian qingshengban jumu* (*Qingsheng Troup's List of Xiqu in the Reign of 4th Years of Daoguang*). See Zhou Mingtai *Daoxian yilai liyuan xinian xiaolu* (*Theatrical Information From the Reigns of Daoguan and Xianfeng onwards*). Shanghai: 1932. In *Jiliju xiqu congshu* (*The Series of Xiqu from Jiliju*), no. 3. p. 5.

³³ Jing Guxue. "You sida huiban kaishi dao jiefangqian de jingju bianyan xingxi gaimao" (An Overview of New Jingju plays' Creation and Performance from the Beginning of the Four Great Companies till 1949). In *Jingju tanwanglu* (*A Record of Jingju's Past*). Beijing: Beijing Chubanshe, 1985, p. 532.

ranking officer in Ministry of Works. He was interested in *xiqu*, and had always been invited to perform on stages as a *piao you* (amateur). According to the regulations of Qing government, officers must not perform on stage. Therefore, Zhang Erkui was discharged from his post. Since his discharge, he started his own stage career. He first performed in the Hechun troupe, and later established his own troupe named Shuangkui. In 1845 he became a leading role of *laosheng*, the head of Sixi troupe, and *jingzhong miao miaoshou* (the head of *xiqu* guild). Zhang Erkui died at the age of forty-six. Such early death was due to the lowly regarded social status of performers. He had been exiled for penal service because of the ostentation of his mother's funeral, which was beyond the standards for a performer. He died in exile.

Zhang Erkui was an erudite man. He turned classical literature into a most popular and beautiful language to describe characters' sentiments. In the play of *Yang Yanhui Visits his Mother*, Zhang Erkui was able to vividly depict the various characters and their complex relationships. More importantly, through the various relationships, he has created a theatrical atmosphere that caused audiences to be happy or sad, and become increasingly intrigued with the development of plots. When the play reached its climax, a sudden change in the plot caused audiences to be greatly relieved.

Zhang Erkui did not want to give any lesson to the audiences in his plays; he left thinking to his audience. In a play of no great length, Zhang Erkui was able to depict emotions between husband and wife, between mother and son, and between

siblings. These emotions were very touching, yet they were in direct conflict with war. Through the relationship between Yang Yanhui and Princess of the Iron Mirror, the play demonstrates that hostility between nationalities is ultimately irresolvable. Therefore, whether to destroy each other in the war, or to turn hostility into friendliness, to turn war into peace, and to turn enemies into relatives, the author left the answers to his audience, allowing them to draw their own conclusions. The play *The Yanmen Gate* was conclusive.

The final and decisive battle between the Liao and the Song, the Battle at Yanmen Gate, was the subject of the *jingju* *The Yanmen Gate*. In the play both sides were commanded by female generals: the Empress Dowager Xiao³⁴ led the Liao troops and She Caihua led the Song troops. Women and children on both sides fought in this desperate battle, the most significant feature of which was, that, due to intermarriage between the Liao and the Song, combatants were, in fact, related. This play was also called *Balang tanmu* (*The Eighth Son Visits his Mother*) and, because of its theme of unity across national hostilities, *Nanbei he* (*Peace of South and North*).

The play opens when Yang Yanshun, She Caihua's son, who had been captured together with his brother Yang Yanhui, by the Liao, and was now living in

³⁴ Grand Empress Xiao (953-1009), named Chuo, styled Yanyan, was the Empress of Emperor Jingzong. After his son Yelulongxu had ascended the throne, she was respected as the Grand Empress, and she helped with many political issues of the country. She was a figure of capability and action in the Liao nation. See Tuo Tuo *Liao shi* (*The History of the Liao Kingdom*). Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1983. pp. 1201-02.

Empress Dowager Xiao's palace, heard that his mother was leading the Song troops in the battle at the Yanmen Gate. With the assistance of his wife, Princess Qinlian, Empress Dowager Xiao's daughter, he obtained the Mandate Arrow and sneaked out of Yanmen to meet his mother. However, during his visit, the Song generals Meng Liang and Jiao Zan stole the Arrow and used it to trick the Liao guards at Yanmen Gate to open it, which enabled them to win a skirmish with the Liao.

Empress Dowager Xiao was furious when she heard about Yang Yanshun's visit to his mother and threatened to execute her daughter Qinglian. Fortunately, Bilian, her sister interceded and saved her. The sisters then persuaded their mother, Empress Dowager Xiao to allow them to lead the troops to recapture Yang Yanshun. However, the Song captured them instead. When Empress Dowager Xiao heard this, she was again, furious because she believed that the Qinglian and Bilian had deliberately surrendered to the Song so the Qinglian would be with her husband. The Empress Dowager Xiao had Bilian's husband, Yang Yanhui, her children and Qinglian's children arrested, tied up and displayed at the top of the Yanmen Gate, ready for execution. In retaliation She Caihua also brought Bilian and Qinglian out, tied up and ready for execution. Since the Empress Dowager Xiao loved her daughters and also their children, her grandchildren, she withdrew the death sentence and Yang Yanhui and both sides of the family were saved.

However the battle between the Liao and Song continued, with a number of small children, notably, the seven year-old Yang Qijie (Yang seventh sister) who came along to help, and the nine year-old Meng Huaiyuan, son of a Song General, Meng Liang, and a Liao woman. At the end of the play, the war was resolved in peace. Empress Dowager Xiao pardoned Yang Yanhui, Yang Yanshun and their family, and welcomed the Song troops into the Yanmen City. The two erstwhile enemies, the Liao and Song, celebrated the end of hostilities and the reunification of their families.

Yanmen Gate had eight volumes and was a full-length play. It was written specifically for the Sixi Troupe, and together the Shuangkui Troupe's *Yang Yanhui Visits His Mother*, became the most famous in the theatrical world. During the reigns of Emperor Xianfeng and Tongzhi (1851-1875), *Yanmen Gate* was performed in Manchu costume, ensuring their continued popularity.³⁵

Yanmen Gate, on the one hand, depicted cruel, bloody battle, but on the other, portrayed an underlying desire for peace and reconciliation. Both the Yang sons, Yang Yanhui and Yang Yanshun, were captured by the Liao and subsequently married the Liao Empress Dowager's daughters. Thus the two enemy families became relatives by marriage. This complex relationship had the two commanders caught between a rock and a hard place. When Empress Dowager Xiao decided to

³⁵ Shanghai Yishu Yanjiusuo (Shanghai Institute of Art Research) and Zhongguo Xiqujia Xiehui Shanghai Fenhui (Association of Chinese Theatre Artists, Shanghai Branch), eds. *Zhongguo xiqu quyi cidian (Dictionary of Chinese Xiqu and Chinese Folk Art Forms)*. Shanghai: Shanghai Cishu Chubanshe, 1985, p. 580.

kill the family of Yang Yanhui and Yang Yanshun, she was actually going to kill her daughters and grandchildren. When She Caihua seized the two princesses in revenge, she would be actually planning to kill her own daughters-in-law. This relationship was also reflected in Meng Huaiyuan. He is a General of Liao, but his father was a famous General of Song Dynasty.

Yanmen Gate was full of romance. Though the play highlighted the human cost of war in their portrayal of women, children and old people desperately fighting in a cruel and bloody battle, the whole play was without sadness and sighs. By displaying the relationships between various characters, the play showed that it is not necessary to continuously fight with relatives killing relatives. The peaceful ending seemed perfectly logical.

Yang Yanhui Visits His Mother and *Yanmen Gate* celebrated the humanity of the participants, their love and loyalty to each other as husband and wife, mother and daughter, grandmother and grandchildren, relationships that were more important to them than the enmity between their nations. These relationships, in the end, achieved greater peace than any battle could achieve.

The war was historical, but the details as depicted in these plays were fictitious. The historical Yang family had seven sons not eight, and none of them was captured by the Liao to become sons-in-law of the Empress Dowager Xiao or tried to visit their mother She Caihua in the middle of the battle, with help by their wives. Although these plots are fiction, the circumstances they describe of

intermarriage between hostile and warring nations leading to peace and the possibility of peaceful co-existence were common in northern China. Such possibilities highlighted the idea of intermarriage and thus strengthened the theme. This theme had, from the novels of the Ming Dynasty to *jingju*, experience a great leap forward.

Yang Yanhui in the Novel and Xiqu

The novel *The Romance of the Yang Family Mansion* was published in 1606. In the novel, when the fourth son of the Yang family was caught by Liao in Haotian Temple of You Prefecture, he remained calm and confident. The Liao Grand Empress Dowager Xiao admired his fearless attitude, and wanted to betroth her daughter to him.³⁶ At first Yang Yanhui refused but later he thought, “I should obey them. As long as I am still alive, I still have the hope of one day defending my country again.”³⁷ Therefore, he named himself “Mu Yi”, and married Princess Qionger. Yang Yanhui was well treated by the Princess and Empress Dowager Xiao. Later, when Liao and Song were at war again, Yang Yanhui operated from within to help the Song army defeat the Liao troops, which caused Empress Dowager Xiao to commit suicide. Yang Yanhui thought of Empress Dowager Xiao’s kindness to him, so he asked the Eight-Sage King to give her a grand burial.

³⁶ Zhu Shaohua ed. *Yang Jiafu yanyi (The Romance of the Yang Mansion)*. Shanghai: Shanghai Guji Chubanshe, 1985, p. 31.

Historically Yang Yanhui was a typical Song official, whom the novelist tried to recreate into a great man with a complex character in the novel *The Romance of the Yang Family Mansion*. It was a bold attempt. However, the character was not a successful one. The problem was that when the author attempted to mold the image of Yang Yanhui, he was inspired, yet also trapped by “the incident of Li Ling (? -74 B.C.) of the Han Dynasty (206 B.C.-220 A.D.)”. Li Ling was the grandson of Li Guang (? -119 B.C.), who was the famous and talented General of the Han. In the battles against the Huns, Li Ling fought with only eight thousand mounted troops against the Huns’s one hundred thousand. After winning numerous battles, Li Ling finally yielded to the Huns due to unequal sizes of the armies. However, he believed that he might one day still be able to defend his country but this was just wishful thinking. In fact he was forced to train the Huns’ troops in the following year. For this reason, the members of Li Ling’s family were arrested and thrown in to prison by the order of Emperor Hanwu. In the novel of *The Romance of the Yang Family Mansion*, the author made the connection between Yang Ye and Li Ling. When Yang Ye was trapped at Mt Lianglang, he saw a temple before him. He called upon the troops to come forward and look at it; and then realized that it was the Temple of Li Ling. Yang got down from his horse and wrote a poem on the wall of the temple: “You were the General of Han. I am the official of Song. We were both framed. When can such injustices be redressed?”³⁸

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid. pp. 39-40.

Like Li Ling, Yang Yanhui (the fourth son) was prepared to “give up my temporary freedom to defend my country.” However, the author failed to successfully handle the relationship between Yang Yanhui and his motherland; he also failed to handle the relationship between Yang Yanhui and Khitan Liao, where he had spent many years. The novel had two conflicting themes: on the one hand it reflected the developing trend of mutual acceptance and tolerance between two nations through the portrayal of Empress Dowager Xiao and the Princess's goodwill towards Yang Yanhui; on the other hand the central focus of the novel was on Yang Yanhui's efforts to protect his motherland and defeat the Liao. The novelist's attempt at creating a hero with these two contradictory impulses failed and he comes across as a colourless and unrealistic figure. Moreover, he accepted kindness from the Liao Dowager Empress but at the same time plotted against her. This was a problem for the playwrights when adapting the novel to play.

Breakthrough in Themes

Yang Yanhui Visits His Mother and *Yanmen Gate* developed a different theme in *jingju*. The fourth and eighth sons of the Yang family were lost in Liao and later married into the Liao imperial family. The playwright deleted the parts of the story in which Yang Yanhui became a spy for Song, and the suicide of Grand Empress Dowager Xiao. The two plays described Yang Yanhui and Yang Yanshun's contradictory and complicated feelings. They loved their motherland but also loved their new country; they loved their mother, brothers and sisters but also loved the new relatives in the Khitan Liao. The intention of the playwrights was

not to portray the saviour of the Song. The playwrights borrowed a famous Yang general from the novel in order to present as praiseworthy and honourable the emotions of this respectable figure: someone who loved their motherland while at the same time loving their new country. As a reward for these attitudes the two hostile sides gradually achieved reconciliation.

The relationship between Yang and Empress Dowager Xiao, and the feeling of Yang Yanhui and Yang Yanshun loving two countries represent a new relationship between different nationalities. *Yang Yanhui Visits His Mother* and *Yanmen Gate* did not promote extreme national antagonism. The Princesses' father was shot dead by the eldest son of the Yang family at the battle at Golden Sandy Beach. Most of the Yang family generals also died in battle, but the plays did not present national patriotism. They followed the plot of *The Romance of the Yang Family Mansion*, which changed the relationship between the two families from enemies into relatives. The play further emphasized this new relationship through She Caihua's respect for her daughters-in-law, and her acceptance her sons' marriages.

This change of theme allowed the traditional frontier fortress play to reflect the new spirit of the era. Historically, due to the continuous fighting on the borderland, literature of frontier fortress became an important branch of classical Han literature. This type of literature presented different styles in different eras. It was majestic in *Tang shi* (the poetry of Tang Dynasty) and depressed in *Song ci* (the poetry of Song Dynasty). These kinds of sentiments and thinking were

inherited by *Yuan zaju* and *Ming chuanqi*. For this kind of literature, regardless of the differences in styles of various eras, most playwrights “drew a clear distinction between the enemy and ourselves” in expressing their understanding of the wars of their special periods, and consequently became renowned for their works.³⁹ Ming novels began to exhibit new characteristics. From novels to *jingju* plays, there was a clear breakthrough in the contents. Playwrights no longer just took the Han people’s side in expressing their emotions. In *Yang Yanhui Visits His Mother* and *Yanmen Gate* there was no distinctions between the good and evil as often represented in traditional plays of similar themes. Both sides of the antagonistic relationship were positively portrayed. This breakthrough indicates that, hostility between nationalities that was a feature of traditional frontier fortress plays, was being replaced by an equal relationship between different nationalities.

This kind of breakthrough not only embraced the traditional aesthetics as basis, but also pushed the traditional Chinese happy endings to a new level. While the traditional *xiqu* of the Yuan and Ming Dynasties was skilled in describing love stories, the *xiqu* of the Qing Dynasty, building on this skill, created a series of stories about love between enemies and antagonistic relatives-by-marriage. While the classical *xiqu* of the Yuan Dynasty established the trend for a happy ending, which was further entrenched in the *xiqu* of the Ming Dynasty, the Qing *xiqu* raised the theme of happy ending to a new level with these stories of love between

³⁹ *Yuan zaju - Zhaoshi gu'er (An Orphan of the Zhao Family)* and *Hangong qiu (Imperial Court of the Han Dynasty in Autumn)* are two famous plays. The former uses a historical event to express the playwright’s yearning for the Song Dynasty, and the latter manifests dissatisfaction towards the Mongolians’ rule through a love story.

enemies or different nationalities. Many *jingju* plays featured this theme of love across the boundaries of nationalities or ethnic groups achieving a greater union between different ethnic groups. For example, *Cha guang (Patrolling the Gate)* celebrates love between a Han general and a female Manchu general.

The play portrayed that the Han General Liu Tangjian passed through *Youjia* gate of north Fan state. It was dark, and he decided to have a nap near the gate. The gatekeeper You Chunfeng, who was a female general, patrolled the area and saw that Liu Tangjian was deeply asleep. She ordered her assistant Suoluo Yan to steal Liu Tangjian's horse and spear. In the process, she was informed that Liu lived in Han. You Chunfeng saw that Liu Tangjian was handsome. She wanted to marry him. Suolou Yan saw the chemistry between the two. He came up to them and asked for reward for his help. Liu Tangjian promised him that if one day he were enthroned, he would offer him a position as a minister. Suolou Yan did not want to be an official minister, so You Chunfeng promised him that he would become a "Commander of Manchu and Han Army". Suolou Yan was satisfied. You Chunfeng and Liu Tangjian married that night. "You live in the Fan state and I live in the Han area. Being a thousand miles apart, the ties of love join us together." The play highlighted the theme of "unity of Manchu and Han" and "Manchu and Han people are one family".⁴⁰

⁴⁰ See *Che Wang Fu Repertoire*, the original script was from Anqin banzi which was Anhui troupe, see *Zhui baiqiu (A Collection of Play Pieces)*, Wanhua zhuren and Qian Dechang ed., Hongwentang Chuban, 1777. Taipei: Taiwan Xuesheng Shuju Yingyin, pp. 4837-48.

Mutual reconciliation between nationalities or ethnic groups to mutual understanding between different people became the feature of the development of frontier fortress literature. Since the mid-Qing, from Wei Changsheng's *Falling from a Tower* to the *jingju* plays of *Jin hudi* (*The Golden Butterflies*) and *Wucai yu* (*Five Colors Sedan*), all plays portrayed the theme of turning hostility into friendship. This creative inclination demonstrated that the playwrights' good intentions. They exhibited how a multi-nationality country should, after prolonged periods of war, resolve the hostilities between different ethnic groups and be able to co-exist in equality and friendship.

7.4 Conclusion

In the history of the Chinese novel, *The Romance of the Yang Family Generals* was not considered an outstanding work, but the plays of the Generals of the Yang Family which were based on the novel are of great artistic merit. War, peace, intermarriage, and the multicultural nation are the contents and the themes of the plays of the Yang Family Generals. These plays praised the Yang Family Generals for defending their country, and protested the cruelty of war. On the other hand, these plays were also directed at looking forward to a peaceful life and reflected on the theme of China's multi-ethnic unity.

Wars created complex relationships. The members of Yang Family were all loyal and brave warriors. Most of them died in protecting their motherland. But when two of them were seized by Lao troops and were married in Liao, the two hostile

families became relatives. Different nationalities, hostile to each other in war, accepted each other when the wars were over. Peace was built on this relationship. The relationship between the two families, Yang and Xiao, was a symbol of the Song and Liao; and the relationship between two nations, Song and Liao, was a miniature of the multicultural society of the Qing.

The masterpieces of the plays of the Yang Family Generals, *Yang Yanhui Visits His Mother* and *Yanmen Gate*, were based on *The Romance of the Yang Family Generals*, but they were better. The hope for peace was the central focus of these plays, replacing the plots of *Yang Yanhui*, in which he became a planted agent to defeat the Khitan Liao. These plays were thus involved the issue of the era: a multicultural nationality. The attempt to explore this issue had already been initiated by Ming novelists, and was finally completed by playwrights of the Qing Dynasty. The emergence of these works meant that, with the change in relationships between nationalities, playwrights were trying to describe subjects within the literatures of frontier fortress that traditionally centred on the Han culture using the new idea of equal relationship between ethnic groups.

Chapter Eight

Conclusion

In the Introduction, I suggested that Yu Qiuyu failed to recognize the significant achievements of *jingju* plays. By studying the *jingju* plays produced from 1790 to 1911, this thesis shows that *jingju* playwrights reflected the aspirations and ideals of the ordinary people at the time, and represented the new ideas of the era, just like *Yuan zaju* and *chuanqi*, *jingju* plays, which left behind excellent examples and plays of epoch-making significance.

In this chapter, I will present a general summary of the features and achievements of *jingju* plays, to further clarify their significance, and to analyse the reasons for these achievements. From this process, we can then see whether the achievements of *jingju* plays were, as Yu Qiuyu had said, “could not be considered in the same breathe with *Yuan zaju* and *chuanqi*”. Moreover, it will demonstrate whether the writings of *jingju* playwrights were simply “selected and adapted” from previous works, and whether they were lowly educated playwrights.

8.1 The Features and Significance of *Jingju* Plays

According to Wu Mei (1884-1939), a *xiqu* critic, *chuanqi* plays in the early Qing contained both beautiful songs and fascinating content , but *chuanqi* during the mid-

Qing had only beautiful songs without content. Wu Mei further argues that *chuanqi* in the late Qing had neither beautiful songs nor fascinating content.¹ Therefore, as classical *xiqu* fell into decay, popular *xiqu* rose. The significance of *jingju* plays is that, they, together with various kinds of newly formed regional theatres, created the era of popular *xiqu*.

During *jingju*'s "incubation" period, its most prominent feature is the marketplace play, which brought onto the stage subjects that had hitherto been thought to be inappropriate for theatre were. Ordinary people and daily affairs were injected with greater significance, and used to praise the good and to criticise the bad. Marketplace plays enabled people to find their identities and their lives on stage. Their contents were very familiar to the audiences. The subjects of common matters and ordinary states of mind freed theatre from the burden of traditional history, and thus changed the aesthetic standards of theatre.² In an accessible style, theatres were no longer the vehicles for the political goals or intellectual missions. Consequently, the dominant concept of the function of literature and the arts achieved artistic freedom and variety.

One feature of *jingju* plays in the post-incubation "development" period is the performance of history plays on a grand scale. The fact that sacred and inviolable idols of the imperial system were brought onto stage indicated that historical

¹ Wu Mei. *Zhongguo xiqu gailun (An Outline of Chinese Xiqu)*. Hong Kong: Taiping Shuju, 1964 (Photorep), p. 39.

² Just as some American churches and German scholars once ruthlessly criticised rock and roll, jazz and other popular music, but could not pull people away from these popular music.

interpretation was not the sole right of historians: popular *xiqu* also fulfilled the function to criticise and evaluate history. This had great significance for the lowly regarded actors at the time. It allowed performers, who never had the right to question politics and current affairs, to comment on history and to criticise reality.

A strong theme in history plays is that “the Emperor also should be beheaded for his wrongdoing.” This theme presented a concept of “equality”: even emperors must also bear legal consequences if they violate the law. This theme, together with love story plays, the courtroom plays and the frontier and fortress plays, formed a whole that represented the new ideas of the era. Love story plays represented “equality” between the sexes, courtroom plays, “equality” before the law, and frontier fortress plays, an equal relationship between nationalities.

Love story play is the strength of classical *xiqu*, and thus a series of outstanding plays were produced. *Yuan zaju The Story of the Western Chamber* and *Ming chuanqi Peony Pavilion* are two milestone works. The former expressed the ideal that marriage should not be only decided by parents while the latter, using a romantic expression and through Du Liniang, who died for love and revived for love, to demonstrate her strong will for love. Aimed as a critique of *lixue* moral cords, the emergence of these two works are of great significance in the history of Chinese *xiqu*.

From *zaju* to *chuanqi* and till *jingju*, Song Maoyu's *Marriage in a Closet* is a new epoch-making literary play in the history of *xiqu*. The breakthrough in *Marriage in a Closet* was that it demonstrated a desire for free marriage. In fact, the late Qing was a time when young men and women were no longer satisfied with being confined to traditional study room and boudoir. They left their families in search for independence and marriage freedom. *Marriage in a Closet*, produced during this period, was steeped in the spirit of the time.

One needs bravery and the ability to lead an independent life in order to leave home. This is not only reflected in the characters of *Marriage in a Closet*, but also revealed in others *jingju* plays. As mentioned in Chapter Four, the bravery and abilities of women were fully affirmed in *jingju*. Under the playwright's pen, almost every woman had greater ability and higher intelligence than her male counterparts. Playwrights used their extreme romantic imagination to portray a number of figures more modern than those in *chuanqi*, and hence drew audiences' attention to women's ability. On the issue of marriage, women were no longer passive, but had the courage to propose to men. These enabled love story plays to make new breakthroughs, which offered almost the ideal of a true equality for both sexes in a love relationship, even the lowliest regarded musician prostitutes should have the right to an equal love life.

The Bao Zheng play and the courtroom play are another significant genre of *jingju*.

It has reflected a critical attitude, from various angles, towards the legal inequalities existed in the traditional Chinese society and the thinking of writers. This can be seen in the plot of the *jingju* play *A Pair of Jade Bracelets*. Song Qiaojiao went to the capital city and stopped an official carriage in order to lodge a complaint. In the face of the Grand Empress' impressive and dignified guard of honour, Song Qiaojiao's father trembled all over with fear. Even though Song Qiaojiao tried to calm her father several times, under the intimidation of the guards, she was also terribly frightened and fainted ultimately. This detail truthfully relives the strict hierarchical concept in Chinese society, and the unreasonableness of the law built upon these concepts. It was always very dangerous for ordinary people to sue a government official, or for a low ranking official to sue a high-ranking official. The value of plays like *A Pair of Jade Bracelets* lies in truthfully reliving the thoughts and feelings of an ordinary person when suing the government. Even though they were trembling with fears, they still realised that they must seek justice for themselves.

Bao Zheng Decapitates Bao Mian and *Four Officials* indicted a number of corrupted officials. When we think of the historical background of the nineteenth century, then we can see that the *jingju* playwrights were in fact bearing double responsibilities. On the one hand, they wanted to criticise the behaviour of corrupted officials for being a by-product of the traditional government system. On the other hand, the late Qing was a time of social reform. Many officials took advantage of the social changes by being more corruptive and put the laws in total disregard. The object of

criticisms by *jingju* playwrights also includes these people, and indirectly, the emperors.

Confucians typically divided emperors into two categories: “the benevolent emperor” and tyrants. “The benevolent emperors” were models and the tyrants were historical sinners. If we are to view the Bao Zheng play and the history play in *jingju* as a whole, the emperors involved in plays like *Heir Apparent Exchanged for a Leopard Cat* and *Slashing the Imperial Robe* were neither benevolent emperors nor tyrants by Confucian standards. What the playwrights was centrally concerned with was whether an emperor should be tried and punished like ordinary people when he committed a crime. At a time when ordinary people had no rights, not only did the *jingju* playwrights dare to raise questions, they were also bold enough to suggest ideas of action.

A critical issue that the *jingju* plays dealt with was the relationship between the traditional examination system and the jurisdiction, including the conduct of judges in order to live up to its name. The series of outstanding plays listed above illustrate that the so-call traditional “rule of virtue” means in fact applying different laws at different levels of the society. At the time when the old system of laws had showed its flaws and the anticipated new system had not yet arrived, the playwrights used a number of idealised laws as a critique. In doing so, they gave expression to their yearning for “equality before the law”, and in the Bao Zheng play and Courtroom play in particular, pushed classical *xiqu* onto a higher plane.

The frontier fortress plays of *jingju* also demonstrate its distinctive characteristic of the time. In classical *xiqu*, the frontier fortress play was used to arouse people's patriotism. This idea was inherited by *jingju* plays but the latter went a step further, as can be seen in *Yang Yanhui Visits his Mother* and *Yanmen Gate*, where the antagonistic people of both sides are generally described as positive characters. This kind of representation indicates that playwrights no longer upheld the traditional Han culture as central when dealing with frontier fortress plays.

More importantly, through a description of the cruelty of war and the touching relationships between the characters, the playwrights impacted on the audience's mentality and allowed people to see that wars and hostilities between nations should be replaced with an equal and friendly relationship. Beginning with war but ending in peace, these plays summarized the traditional frontier fortress literature, thereby generating epoch-making significance.

Jingju plays also constituted a colourful and extremely romantic phase in the history of Chinese *xiqu*. From depicting daily life matters to matters involving important issues, *jingju* playwrights raised a number of major questions not touched on by classical *xiqu* playwrights. The multi-faceted breakthroughs showed that the popular *xiqu* playwrights achieved a great leap forward when compared to playwrights of classical *xiqu*.

In all fairness, in the Qing Dynasty, when women were prohibited from entering theatre, equality between the sexes was impossible. Whether it was between social classes, the law, and relationship between nationalities, true equality could not exist. However, these ideas of equalities were reflected in *jingju* plays. Although these ideas were simple, vague and not as developed as in modern times, they were very strong.³ Since these relationships were not possible in real life at the time, these works had a prophetic significance.

However, these ideas and features were inevitably considered as crude and “*luantan*” because they departed from classics and rebelled against orthodoxy. Why were *jingju* playwrights able to show to a number of “*luantan*” ideas and features? In other words, why were *jingju* playwrights able to accomplish these achievements?

8. 2 Reasons behind These Achievements

My study shows that commercial factors played an important role in the arts and literature in the later periods of Chinese traditional society, particularly in the late Qing. It enabled the emergence of popular playwrights and promoted the rise of popular literature and the arts. The abolition of the official musician prostitutes led to the full commercialization of the performing arts. Subsequently, the history of *xiqu* entered the “*luantan*” period and nurtured a group of popular playwrights. They inherited the traditions of popular literature and arts, and absorbed the “*luantan*”

³ The present thesis has no intention to speak of the equality ideas derived from the Chinese literature

new ideas from the intellectual circles, creating a new and flourishing period in the history of *xiqu*.

8.2.1 Commercial Development and the New Concepts

Since the sixteenth century, the development in agricultural production helped the commercial economy to grow at an unprecedented pace. Various regional commercial guilds spread throughout China. The increase in number of businessmen and the expansion of the urban society promoted the growth of meeting places. The number of teahouses increased, and when businessmen “saw unjust matters, they would come to teahouses and debate over the matters.”⁴ The growing urban society began to criticise the traditional hierarchical concepts. Businessmen’s wealth stimulated changes in social customs, and the phenomenon of “violating etiquette and prohibitions” appeared. In the Ming Dynasty, gowns with embroidered dragon patterns were symbols of Emperors. In the early Ming Dynasty, Prince Liao Yongzhong was executed because he wore clothes with the pattern of a dragon. But gowns of dragon patterns became suitable clothes for common people in the late Ming Dynasty. Ming laws stated that ordinary people’s houses should not exceed three rooms. However, during the late Ming Dynasty, merchants’ houses not only violated this law, they were also not ashamed of their violations.⁵

with the Western concept of equality. This is because they were derived from different cultures.

⁴ Feng Tianyu, He Xiaoming and Zhou Jiming. *Zhongguo wenhuashi (The History of Chinese Culture)*. Shanghai: Shanghai Renming Chubanshe, 1994, p. 773.

⁵ Ibid. p. 774.

Commercial activities not only enriched the upper class, but also produced a trend of ideology that departed from the classics and rebelled against orthodoxy, and destroyed the hierarchical concepts of the monarchy system and traditional moral codes. Since the sixteenth century, a stream of thought criticised *lixue*. Even the philosophy of Wang Yangming, which was formed on the basis traditional *lixue*, absorbed new concepts of the urban society of its time. One of Wang Yangming's greatest contributions was to propose that scholars, peasants, workers and businessmen were entitled to equal human dignity and that they could all become "sages" through study. In China, a nation that oppressed individualism, "the later Wang Yangming tradition came to lay unprecedented emphasis upon individual self-fulfillment, and to stress social relationships of reciprocal equality rather than hierarchical subordination".⁶

In the seventeenth century, intellectual circles comprehensively exposed and criticised *lixue* and attack the traditional system. Huang Zongxi (1610-1659), Tang Zhen (1630-1704), Gu Yanwu (1613-1682) and Wang Fuzhi were all thinkers who emerged during this period. Huang Zongxi pointed out, "In the past two thousand years, only emperors caused the world to be at turmoil". Tang Zheng believed that "since the Qin Dynasty, all emperors were autocratic".⁷

⁶ Rowe, William T. "The Problem of 'Civil Society' in Late Imperial China", *Modern China*. Vol. 19, number 2, April 1993, pp. 150-51.

⁷ See Feng Tianyu, He Xiaoming and Zhou Jiming. *Zhongguo wenhuashi (The History of Chinese Culture)*. Shanghai: Shanghai Renmin Chubanshe, 1994, pp. 825-27.

In order to correct the rulers from their extreme autocracy, a Qing thinker, Gu Yanwu (1613-1682), suggested “a separation of power”, while Tang Zhen proposed the idea of “restricting the autocracy of the emperor”. The emperor must not command his subordinates as he wishes, and government officials should not be ignorantly loyal but should have their own independent personality. “What the emperor says might not be right, and what the emperor disagrees with might not be wrong.” A country must have a set of basic laws that govern the nation. The emperor must allow his people to discuss politics. “Scholar and students can discuss politics in school, and common people are allowed to criticize the government on the road.” The government should establish universities, in which lecturers and students are allowed to scrutinize the government’s policies. The emperor and government officials should come to the universities to listen to the lectures delivered at the start of every month. A country should not be owned by the emperor. Government officials and common people should not render service to the emperor but to the whole nation.⁸ All of these radical ideas “possessed a significance that went beyond the medieval autocratic system and came closer to modern politics.”⁹

In the eighteenth century, as commerce developed, new ideas were produced amongst scholars. Directed against Song-Ming *lixue*, which was full of moral rhetoric and contempt for speaking about profits, these scholars strove to promote economic activities. Many Confucian scholars left their academic pursuits to enter into business, and became semi-scholars and semi-merchants. As Shen Yao pointed

⁸ Ibid. p. 827-30.

⁹ Ibid. p. 830.

out the Song Dynasty's *lixue* scholars were funded by the government, and therefore had the luxury of engaging in abstract moral teachings. Qian Daxin believed as an intellectual elite, it would be better to engage in commercial activities or productive labour rather than obtaining illegitimate gains in officialdom. This was a challenge to the tradition. It demonstrated that scholars at the time strove to find their individual identity through commercial activities and productive labour. In the area of traditional moral codes, thinkers at the time began their strong critique against the *lixue* dictate that "For the course of nature to exist, human desire must die". Dai Zhen, Wang Zhongxi and Qian Daxin were the most famous critics of these moral codes.

In the nineteenth century, as the Qing Empire gradually declined and with the importation of Western culture, criticism of traditional culture became a public issue. The study of Western scientific technology led to the "Westernization Movement" and industrialization. Traditional moral codes and the monarchy system gradually became obstacles to social development. The diplomat, Guo Songtao, based on his observations overseas, held that the Western political and education systems had their strong points, which China should learn from, and that the harm caused by Song-Ming *lixue* was grave. Yan Fu advocated a more systematic study of Western politics. Various Western intellectual concepts and new ideas were also gradually introduced to China. More important is that the progressive ideas from the past, especially from the thinkers of the sixteenth century, which became the ideological motive behind the social reform. Books banned in the Qiaolong period, such as Li

Zhi's works, were published again in order to demonstrate repudiation against the traditional culture.

Jingju was created and flourished in the nineteenth century. The special historical and social conditions provided playwrights with favourable conditions, and enabled them to deal with more in-depth subjects and to achieve the breakthroughs described in this thesis.

8.2.2 Traditions of Popular Literature and Popular Playwrights

The above achievements of *jingju* plays were closely related to the traditions of popular literature in the later periods of the traditional Chinese society, which included populace writers, popular literature, *jingju* playwrights and so on.

The Rise of Popular Writers

In the history of *xiqu*, playwrights of the Ming and Qing Dynasties had different social status. After emperor Zhu Yuanzhang founded the Ming Imperial, in order to prevent internal power struggles, he granted each prince a set of plays and a private theatrical troupe, hoping that they would indulge in entertainment and lose their desire for political power. Under this influence, the private theatrical troupe reached its peak during the Ming Dynasty, and allowed many upper class officials to participate in play writing. However, it was a different story during the Qing

Dynasty. The Qing government prevented officials from entering the theatre. Consequently, after the mid-Qing, playwrights that represented the main body of play writing were “lower status scholars”.

Although the social status of popular playwrights was low, it does not mean that their education level was low. Though *jingju* playwrights, such as Liu San, Shen Xiaoqing, Lu Shengkui and Wang Xiaonong, all failed to pass the imperial examinations, the fact that they were able to participate in the imperial examination meant that they received high levels of education. During the two hundred and fifty-eight years (1646 to 1904), the Qing government recruited altogether 26,747 *jinshi* (officials-in-waiting) through the imperial examination.¹⁰ This meant that only an average of one hundred and three *jinshi* were recruited every year. Many people who failed had in fact passed examinations at the county, prefecture and provincial levels. At the county level examination, the title granted to successful participants was called *xiucai* (junior scholar). At the provincial level, successful participants acquired the title of *juren* (approved imperial examination entrants). *Xiucai* could teach at *sishu* (the old-style private school), while *juren* could establish *shuyuan* (academy of classical learning) by them. Both of these qualifications were recognised by the government.¹¹

¹⁰ Zheng Yimei. *Qinggong jiemi (Revealing the Inside Story of the Court of the Qing Dynasty)*. Hongkong: Nanyi Chubanshe, 1988, p. 192.

¹¹ If we are to equate the successfully recruited *juren* to the Doctor of Philosophy of today, the education level of those who failed are equivalent to a Masters degree.

Although the non-recruited *juren* could not become officials, they could become government staff, teachers, and there were also some people like Shen Xiaoqing, Liu San and Lu Shenggui, who, because of their interest for the art and other reasons, became *jingju* playwrights. They were called “lower status scholars” because they entered the *xiqu* world - still a guild much discriminated against in the Qing Dynasty. However, it was these “lower status scholars”, who gradually changed the appearance of literature.

Confucian tradition always advocated *xue er you ze shi* (the ones that excelled in their studies could become officials). This idea had a positive impact on the Chinese society for more than two thousand years. It had an egalitarian effect in that it allowed people of the lower stratum to become officials and participate in governing the nation via the imperial examination system. The Confucian doctrine of *shi er you ze xue* (only further study would make an official more outstanding) allowed officials to engage in further academic studies and writing in their spare time. Consequently, for a prolonged period of time, a number of officials were also writers, thinkers or philosophers. In a positive sense, Confucius’ teaching promoted the development of Chinese culture.

However, Confucius’ teaching and the traditional imperial examination system also had a detrimental effect on Chinese culture. The ultimate target for studying to become an official was established at the cost of sacrificing and suppressing the development of other aspects of culture. In order to pass the imperial examinations,

scholars studied literature, history and philosophy, but ignored the development of science. At the same time, officials were also authors, which led to the situation where there were almost no literary works independent from officialdom.

Since the Song Dynasty, as commercial factors became apparent in literature and art, the early professional writers independent of the officialdom began to emerge. They were called *shuhui xiansheng* (members of the writing guild). “These members were people who write various kinds of short stories, *xiqu* plays and lyrics as a profession. The only difference between them and the earlier writers was that they rely on writing to make a living.”¹² Writing guilds accepted different kinds of scholars who could not enter officialdom, giving them an opportunity to use their professional knowledge in the field of literature writing. Hereafter, though the officialdom writers co-existed with the popular writers, the official writers were gradually replaced by the popular writers and professional writers. “Today, when we view the literature written during the later stage of traditional Chinese society, writers such as Guan Hanqing (?-1279), Wang Shifu (dates unknown), Luo Guanzhong (approx 1330-1400), Shi Naian (dates unknown), Wu Cheng-en (approx 1500-1582), Wu Jingzi (1701-1754), Cao Xueqin (?-1763) etc, were all the best scholars of their times, but when they were writing those immortal masterpieces, they were all ordinary people ignored by the powerful society.”¹³

¹² Zhang Geng and Guo Hancheng, chief eds. *Zhongguo xiqu tongshi* (*A History of Chinese Xiqu*). 3 vol. Beijing: Zhongguo Xiju Chubanshe, 1984, vol. 1, p. 43.

¹³ Wu Guoqing. “Guan Hanqing pingzhuan” (*A Critical Biography of Guan Hanqing*). In Huang Tianji, Chief ed. *Wang Jisi congjiao 70 zhounian jinian wenji* (*A Memorial Selection for the Seventieth Anniversary of Wang Jisi's Contribution to Education*). Guangzhou: Zhongshan Daxue Chubanshe, 1993. p. 187.

Almost all *jingju* playwrights belonged to the type as mentioned above, and they were professional writers and popular writers. Amongst them, there were Wang Hongshou--the revolutionist of god plays, Shen Xiaoqing--renowned for his work in plays specializing in fighting scenes, Liu San and Song Maoru, who advocated equality between the sexes in his love story plays, Zhang Ergui, who promoted the hope of peace between nationalities in his frontier fortress plays, Lu Shengkui, the one responsible for “the fad of the Three Kingdoms” and outstanding contributions in courtroom play, and Wang Xiaonong, who contributed to history plays. They were all outstanding playwrights because of the individuality reflected in their works. It was due to this group of highly educated writers that *jingju*, Anhui troupes were able to establish themselves and develop rapidly in Beijing, a city of government officials and scholars.¹⁴

Finally, it needs to be mentioned that the early *jingju* playwrights lived in the market place amongst the common people. This explains why, during *jingju*’s “incubation” period, its most prominent feature is the marketplace plays.

Tradition of the Popular Literature

¹⁴ After 1911, the *jingju* playwrights was a group of returned students who had studied abroad in Europe or Japan, for example Qi Rushan, Feng Youwei, Wu Zhengxiu, Xu Boming, Li Shikan and so on. Others such as Chen Moxiang, Luo Yinggong, Jin Zhongsun and Ouyang Yuqian, they were also playwrights who had both traditional Chinese and Western learning.

The *jingju* plays also benefited from the traditions of popular literature. In the history of Chinese literature, the rise of professional writers and popular writers enabled literary creation to enter a new phase. In the early period of traditional Chinese society, poetry and prose were the “twin” literary forms. Since they were short in length, they were suitable for officials of past dynasties to write in their spare time. With the rise of professional and popular writers, there were possibilities for creating more complicated, large-scale popular literary forms that accommodated the needs of the ordinary people. *Xiqu* and novels were the new “twin” literary forms of the later period of traditional Chinese society.

Popular novels were produced in the Song Dynasty. Between the tenth century and the sixteenth century, novels developed on an unprecedented large scale and had great social influences during the Qing Dynasty. Qian Daxin, a Qing scholar, states, “In ancient times, there were the three religions of Confucianism, Buddhism and Daoism. Since the Ming Dynasty, another religion called novels appeared. Novels did not regard themselves as a religion, but novels were read by scholars, peasants, workers and businessmen, they were even adored by women and children, who were often illiterate. Therefore, the influence of novels might be greater than that of Confucianism, Buddhism and Daoism.”¹⁵

Amongst the popular novels at the time, the history novel was the strongest stream. Its popularity was closely linked to the imperial examination system of the Ming and

Qing Dynasties. Since the beginning of the imperial examination system, different dynasties had different characteristics. The main examination topic of the Tang Dynasty was poetry, while Ming and Qing focused on *ce lun* (theories of tactics of run the country). In order to deal with examination on *ce lun*, familiarity with history was essential. For those scholars who failed in the imperial examination, to depict what they knew about history was not a difficult task. Luo Guanzhong's *Sanguo yanyi* (*The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*), Yin Wei's *xihan tongsu yanyi* (*The Romance of the West Han Dynasty*), and Xie Zhao's *Donghan tongsu yanyi* (*The Romance of the East Han Dynasty*) provided ample examples. Until the Qing Dynasty, the history of every dynasty was depicted in popular historical novels. In particular, except the novel *Dongzhou lieguo* (*The Romance of the East Zhou Dynasty*) that was written by Feng Menglong, a low-ranking official, all other novels were created by popular writers.

Not every era led to the high popularity of history novels. Before the invention of printing, even if people had a great desire for knowledge, the popularity of novels would not have been possible. Prior to the emergence of professional writers and popular writers, it was also unrealistic to rely on official writers to spread popular culture. In the later period of traditional Chinese society, alongside the further economic development and the expansion of cities, in order to accommodate the needs of the people, the popular writers of the Ming and Qing transformed classical historical documents that were very difficult to understand into popular novels. They

¹⁵ See Wang Xiaochuan. *Yuan Ming Qing sandai jinhui xiaoshuo xiqu shiliao* (*The Historical Information of the Banned and Destroyed Novels and Plays during the Yuan, Ming and Qing*)

imparted rudimentary knowledge to the people via novels, which allowed those people who could not read classical Chinese writings or had no chance of reading the official historical records, to also gain knowledge about history through popular novels.

Yieshi (unofficial history) was also a type of popular novel. They recorded miscellaneous matters that the official historical records did not contain. These miscellaneous matters included childhood stories of historical figures and their life after fame. Historical figures were made more specific and vivid and therefore no longer just abstract concepts of power.

Though the materials of the history plays were taken from official historical documents, both the popular history novels and *yieshi* all expressed authors' views and common people's feelings. The "novel" in Chinese was called *xiaomin zhishuo* (words of ordinary people). It originated from the ordinary people and thus serviced the common people. From the contents and the number of publication¹⁶, we can detect the ideological trend at the time.

During the Ming and Qing, some men of insight in the upper class highly valued the outstanding history novels such as *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* and *The Water Margin*. They placed these novels alongside the official historical records and

Dynasties). Taipei: Heluo Tushu Chubanshe, 1980, p. 292

¹⁶ The amount of publication in the Qing is more than twice the total publications from the Han to the Ming, a period extending over nearly two thousand years. See chapter two.

classics, calling them *caizi shu* (books by gifted scholars).¹⁷ These gifted scholars were new stars and great masters in the literature circles from the sixteenth century. Amongst them, Luo Guanzhong and Cao Xueqin are now world famous writers.

It was the works of many generations of popular history novelists that nurtured the readers of the Ming and Qing Dynasties. The traditions formed by popular history novelists also inspired the *jingju* playwrights of the late-Qing to make new contributions. From this perspective, we can say that the achievements of *jingju* plays and its features of history plays were founded on the traditions of popular literature. Without a popular literary tradition of long standing, the features and achievements of *jingju* play would not have been possible. Moreover, the features and achievements of *jingju* play were also a further development of popular literature in the Ming and Qing Dynasties.

The Social Status of Jingju Playwrights

Why were the playwrights of *jingju* able to raise a series of issues that official playwrights of *chuanqi* were unable to raise under the same popular literary tradition? In particular, why were the *jingju* playwrights able to make a series of demands for “equality” in different areas? This is due to their different social status: their views on society and life are different. The classical *chuanqi* playwrights were

¹⁷ Wang Xiaochuan. *Yuan Ming Qing sandai jinhui xiaoshuo xiqu shiliao* (*The Historical Information of the Banned and Destroyed Novels and Plays during the Yuan, Ming and Qing Dynasties*). Taipei: Heluo Tushu Chubanshe, 1980. *Preface*. p. 25.

mostly government officials. They were allowed to write for commercial stages, for their personal private theatrical troupes in the Ming, and were also allowed to write to express their feelings or to practice their literary skills. In the history *xiqu*, there were playwrights of classical *chuanqi* who wrote many outstanding works. However, as official playwrights they were restricted by traditional hierarchical concepts. Even in their outstanding plays, what they express were mostly ideas as to how to perfect the traditional system. Therefore, in the late Qing, as the traditional system was gradually declining, these playwrights were also demoralized, and their plays lost their appeal. On the whole, their aesthetic system was built on hierarchy. This determined that they would not be able to conceive of an equal relationship with the common people.

Different from the playwrights of classical *chuanqi*, as mentioned above, the social status of *jingju* playwrights was low. Due to the discrimination against the theatre guild at the time, performers were unable to enter the imperial examination.

Playwrights, being part of the theatre guild, had great difficulty in gaining recognition by the elite society. Therefore, most of the playwrights concealed their real names. They were living on the margin edge of society. It is this point that has led to great changes in the writing of *xiqu*. As Mackerras argues, "By virtue of their position as social outcasts, the acting profession escaped the deadening effect of such social pressures. Their menial position thus left them greater freedom, in negative sense, to develop higher standards of theatrical entertainment. And where standards

are high, popularity will grow.”¹⁸ Although Mackerras refers to the acting profession, his remarks can be applied to playwrights as well. The popular *xiqu* playwrights, as a group of people discriminated against by tradition, in another sense, also had “greater freedom” in writing plays. “I am not your government official now, thus I am not controlled by you; I do not want to get an official’s salary, so I do not need to be afraid.” To certain extent, these lyrics, sung by Tao Sanchun in *Slashing the Imperial Robe*, in fact expressed the thoughts and aspirations of the playwrights themselves.

At the same time, the commercialization of *xiqu* also led to a new relationship between playwrights and audiences. The playwright’s first priority was to serve and entertain the audience. Apart from writers like Yu Zhi, who viewed writing plays as a tool to “save people’s mind”, most playwrights who depended on the *xiqu* guild wrote not only as artists but also made their living by writing. This meant that playwrights were no longer high above the masses and their relationship with the audience was equal. The Chinese scholar Wu Guoqing believed, when commenting on one of the best playwrights in the history of *xiqu* - Guan Hanqing, that Guan lived amongst the ordinary people and was familiar with the people. Thus he and the characters in his plays were equal.¹⁹ As mentioned above, the early *jingju* playwrights also lived in the market place amongst the common people. Most of the time, the views that they expressed were also taken from the masses. They were a

¹⁸ Mackerras, Colin P., *The Rise of the Peking Opera 1770 - 1870*, Clarendon Press, pp. 230-31.

¹⁹ Wu Guoqin. “Guan Hanqing pingzhuan” (A Critical Biography of Guan Hanqing). In Huang Tianji, chief ed. Wang Jisi congjiao 70 zhounian jinian wenji (A Memorial Selection for the

part of the community and were equal with the audiences. This enabled them to naturally and instinctively express, from different angles, the need for equality in the face of reality and the future.

‘Equality’ in nineteenth-century China was no doubt a “*luantan*” idea. My study indicates that ever since the performing arts became semi-government controlled and semi-commercialized in the Song, commercial factors had promoted “*luantan*” literature and art that aimed to serve the common people. Today, novels such as *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, *The Water Margin* and *Dream of the Red Chamber* are considered classical. However, during the Ming and Qing Dynasties, their authors, Luo Guanzhong, Shi Naian and Cao Xueqin suffered from extreme attacks, and orthodox *literati* even cursed them by saying “three generations of their families will all be mutes.” Outstanding writers in the history of Chinese *xiqu*, such as Guan Hanqing, Wang Shipfu, were cursed by *literati* to go to hell after their death, and never to be reincarnated.²⁰ The reason that these outstanding writers were fiercely attacked was because their works had, from various perspectives, demonstrated a “*luantan*” trend of thought that departed from classics and rebelled against orthodoxy. However, it is evident that without the so-called “*luantan*” ideological trend, there would not have been the flourishing period of popular literature and arts.

Seventieth Anniversary of Wang Jisi’s Contribution to Education). Guangzhou: Zhongshan Daxue Chubanshe, 1993, p. 210

²⁰ Wang Xiaochuan. *Yuan Ming Qing sandai jinhui xiaoshuo xiqu shiliao* (*The Historical Information of the Banned and Destroyed Novels and Plays during the Yuan, Ming and Qing Dynasties*). Taipei: Heluo Tushu Chubanshe, 1980, pp. 307-15.

In the Qing Dynasty, this “*luantan*” period in the history of *xiqu* was full of artistic vigor and vitality. Today, the *jingju* plays are viewed as a huge and complete aesthetic system. This system encompasses many different styles of arts: vivid colloquial language, a new literary style, and new literary forms. These plays demonstrate how Anhui troupes were able to develop the new art of *jingju* from the performance of plays of different regional theatres in the early days and form *luantan* art. These plays are also an encyclopedia and memorandum to the people. They reflect the people’s traditional concepts, express their emotions, and portray their existence and aspirations. They retain much of the collective mind of the people but at the same time reveal the playwrights’ creative individualities. They represent the major achievements of *xiqu* creation since the mid-Qing Dynasty, and are also a legacy of urban literature and arts since the Song and Yuan Dynasties.

This study demonstrates the incorrectness of the judgments made by Yu Qiuyu that “the achievement of *jingju* plays could not be considered in the same breathe with *Yuan zaju* and *chuanqi*”. It shows that the creativity of *xiqu* in the eighteenth and nineteenth century was magnificent rather than, as Yu Qiuyu argued “very weak”. At the same time, *jingju* playwrights that have made great contribution to *xiqu* writings of the nineteenth century were not lowly educated. Different from the traditional official writers, they were a new generation of popular writers who emerged during the later period of imperial China.

Appendix A

Dynasties

Xia	c. 2100-1600 BC
Shang	c. 1600-1028 BC
Zhou	1027-256 BC
Qin	221-156 BC
Han	206 BC-AD 220
Three Kingdoms	AD 220-265
Western Jin	265-317
Eastern Jin	317-420
Northern and Southern Dynasties	420-589
Sui	589-618
Tang	618-907
Five Dynasties	907-960
Song	960-1279
Northern Song	960-1126
Southern Song	1127-1279
Liao	947-1125
Xi Xia	1032-1227
Jin	1115-1234
Yuan	1279-1368
Ming	1368-1644
Qing	1644-1911
Republic	1912-
People's Republic	1949-

Qing Dynasty

Shunzhi	1644
Kangxi	1662
Yongzheng	1723
Qianlong	1736
Jiaqing	1796
Daoguang	1821
Xianfeng	1851
Tongzhi	1862
Guangxu	1875
Xuantong	1909

Appendix B

Plays List (An English and Chinese Bilingual)

These plays are evaluated or mentioned in this thesis.

- A Cantonese Scholar (Guang ju)*
- A Case Judge by Six Official Departments (Liubu dashen)*
- A Chain of Schemes (Lianhuan tao)*
- A Charming Mansion (Mi ren guan)*
- A Collection of Actors and Official Musician Prostitutes (Qinglou ji)*
- A Dangerous Meeting (Dandao hui)*
- A Fair judgment (Gongping pan)*
- A Gamble between Wife and Concubine (Shuang yao hui)*
- A Great Case of Injustice (Qiyuan bao)*
- A Green Crystal (Kong qingshi)*
- A Great Marriage (Long feng pei)*
- A Homicide case (Sha pi)*
- A Love Story about the Steel Bow (Tiegong yuan)*
- A Marriage in a Closet (Meiyu pei)*
- A Marvelous Courtesan (Yanzhi hu)*
- A Pair of Jade Bracelets (Shuang yuzhuo)*
- A Play of the Whip (Da lianxiang)*
- A Private Complaint (Qie Sugong)*
- A Shoal of White River (Bai shui tan)*
- A Son Cleaves a Mountain to Save his Mother (Pishan jiumu)*
- A Story of Perfect Morals (Wu Lun quanbeiji)*
- A Talented and Romantic Scholar (Fengliu bang)*
- A Triumphant Marriage (Deyi yuan)*
- A Virtuous Lady Mourns her Fiancé (Xianliang nü diaoxiao)*
- A Wonderful Military Courtesan (Yu linglong)*
- An Exchanged Wedding (Dui linghua)*

After the Reunion (Tuanyuan zhihou)
Appointing as Marquis (Xi fenghou)
Bao Zheng Beheads Lu Zailang (Lu Zailang)
Bao Zheng Decapitates Bao Mian (Zha Bao Mian)
Bao Zheng Decapitates Chen Shimei (Za mei ji)
Black-faced General Abuses the Court (Hei Dachao)
Borrowing Shoes (Jie xue)
Bragging about his Deeds (Chou biaocong)
Burning the Pot (Shao guo)
Coincidental Wedding (Qiao Yinyuan)
Cut off Arm (Duanbi)
Delivering a Silver Lantern (Song yindeng)
Divide up the Family Property (Fen jia)
Dreaming of Butterflies (Hudie meng)
Drum Dance (Huagu)
Du Shiniang (Du Shiniang)
Explaining a Nursery Rhyme (Jiang sanzijing)
Falling from a Tower (Gun lou)
Famen Temple (Famen si)
Farewell to his Beloved (Bawang beiji)
Feigned Madness (Zhuang feng)
Fighting in Changsha (Zhan Changsha)
Five Colors Sedan (Wucai yu)
Flirtation of a Monk and Nun (Xiangtiao)
Four Officials (Si jinshi)
Gate of Fanjiang (Fanjiang guan)
General and Premier United as One (Jiang xiang he)
Golden Rule for Advocating Virtue (Quanshan jingke)
Great Happiness (Hehuan tu)
Heir Apparent Exchanged for a Leopard Cat (Limao huan taizi)
History of Romance (Qing-shi)

Hitting the Flour Vat (Da miangang)
Huarong Path (Huarong dao)
In a Prime of Manhood (Dingsheng chunqiu)
Jade Phoenix Chamber (Cui feng lou)
Judging Pan Hong (Shen Pan Hong)
Lessons in Depravity (Fengliu jian)
Li Gang Abuses the Court (Li Gang fanchao)
Lianglang Mountain (Lianglang shan)
Liuxi and Crown Prince Chenxiang (Liuxi chenxiang taizi)
Liu Yi's Message (Liuyi chuanshu).
Longing for the World (Sifang)
Lotus Handkerchief (Xiang lian pai)
Mangdang Mountain (Mangdang Shan)
Memorial Gateway of Benevolent Rule (Dezheng fang)
Mountain Mian (Mian shan)
Mu Guiying Proposes Marriage (Mu Guiying zhaoqin)
Mulian Saves his (Mother Mulian jiumu quanshan xiwen)
One Liang of Paint (Yi langqi)
Offer a Humble Apology (Fujing qingzui)
Investitures of the Gods (Fengshen tian bang)
Paifeng Demonstrates her Martial arts skills (Paifeng dagun)
Palace of Eternal Life (Changsheng dian)
Peaceful Raft (Shengping baofa)
Peach-blossomed Fan (Taohua shan)
Peony Pavilion (Mudan ting)
Penggong Decides Cases (Penggong an)
Precious Lotus Flower Lamp (Baolian deng)
Pretending to be Insane at the Palace (Jindian zhuangfeng)
Punishing the Ten Evils (Leida shi er)
Qin Xuemei Cries at the Mourning Hall (Xuemei diaoxiao)
Qin Xuemei Teaches the Shang Family's Son (Xuemei jiaozi)

Qingfeng Pavilion (Qingfeng ting)
Reaching Hell (Tan yinshan)
Reading the Bang in a Dream (Meng bang)
Saving a Courtesan (Jiu fengchen)
Selling Rice at Chenzhou (Chenzhou tiaomi)
Selling Rouge (Mai yanzhi)
Seven Stars Temple (Qixing miao)
Showing the Cooking Rod (Yan huogun)
Slashing the Imperial Robe (Zhan huangpao)
Story-telling (Shuoshu)
Swing Boat (Dang hu chuan)
Taking off Hats in Celebration (Jue ying hui)
Tending the Cattle (Xiao fangniu)
The Capture of Eight Major Outlaws (Ba dana)
The Four Dreams in Linchuan County (Linchuan simeng)
The Golden Butterflies (Jin hudie)
The Golden Sandy Beach (Jing shatan)
The Good Fortune of an Unusual Girl (Qin ün fu)
The Green Peony (Lü mudan)
The Heroine - Shisan Mei (Shisan Mei)
The Huanghe Tower (Huanghe lou)
The Injustice Case of Du Er (Dou Er yuan)
The Lake of Luoma (Luoma hu)
The Little Widow Goes up to a Grave (Xiao guafu shangfen)
The Love of the Western Chamber (Xixiang ji)
The Marriage of a Blockhead (Shazi chengqin)
The Nine Lotus Lantern (Jiu lian deng)
The Peony Pavilion (Mudan ting)
The Pipa Song (Pipa ji)
The Qingfeng Pavilion (Qingfeng ting)
The Steel Lotus (Tie Lianhua)

The Stockades Village of Muke (Muke zai)
The Story of Double Bell (Shuangling ji)
The Story of Pushing Mill (Tuimo ji)
The Story of the Western Chamber (Xixiang ji)
The Top Candidate in All Three Examinations (Sanyuan ji)
The Tunes of Drum (Hua guzi)
The Village of Fierce Tiger (Ehu chun)
The Water Margin (Zhongyi xuantu)
The Yang Family Generals (Zhaodai xiaoshao)
Top in the Examination (Dingyuan)
Traveling to Henan (Xia henan) The Three Points to Turn off a Road (Sancha kou)
Visiting Relatives (Tan qin)
Yang Yanhui Visits his Mother (Silang tanmu)
Yanmen Gate (Yanmen guan)
Zhang Sheng Cooks the Sea (Zhangsheng zhuhai)

NOVELS

Dream of the Red Chamber (Honglou meng)
Investitures of the Gods (Fengshen tian bang)
Penggong Decides Cases (Penggong an)
Strange Tales from the Leisure Studio (Liaozai zhiyi)
The Romance of the East Han Dynasty (Donghan tongsu yanyi)
The Biography of the Northern Song (Bei Song zhizhuan)
The Romance of the Three Kingdoms (Sanguo yanyi)
The Romance of the West Han Dynasty (Xihan tongsu yanyi)
The Romance of the Yang Family Generals (Yangjia jiang yanyi)
The Romance of the Yang Family Mansion (Yangjiafu yanyi)
Water Margin (Shuihu Zhuan)

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